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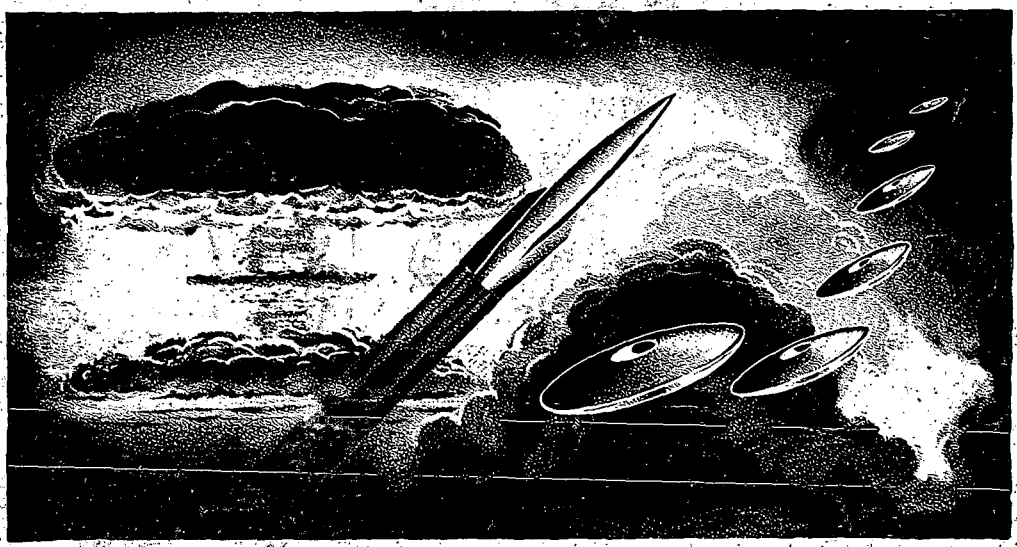

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VOLUME 13 NUMBER 3

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, suggested by a scene from "Secret of the Flaming Ring"

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

AFTER FIVE years on the Ziff-Davis Fiction Group masthead, Managing Editor Bill Hamling has resigned to turn his capable editorial talents elsewhere. We miss Bill—and wish him the very best of success in his new venture. With his abilities, we're sure that anything he undertakes will make its mark.

BILL'S LEAVING set us off on a trail of nostalgic day-dreaming regarding our magazines. We thought of the almost fantastic growth in popularity of science-fantasy in the last few years—and feel a justified pride in having fostered and been responsible for at least part of this sweeping trend. We recalled the start of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—in our first offices in Chicago: with Ray Palmer, then editor of the ZD Fiction Group, and a select gathering of writers and artists to whom we confided the objectives of this new magazine, and the direction in which we intended it to grow.

OUR FIRST issue—May of 1939—featured such names as Eando Binder, Ross Rocklynne, Frederic Arnold Kummer Jr., A. Hyatt Verrill. Among the illustrators were the already well-known Robert Fuqua, Julian S. Krupa, and Frank R. Paul. The enthusiastic response of our readers made us proud, for it showed us we were filling a need in your reading pleasure. Our second issue confained the old master of science-fantasy, Edgar Rice Burroughs, as well as the renowned Thornton Ayre, Nelson S. Bond, John Russell Fearn, among others. And from this point on, we were in.

AS TIME went on, our magazines grew and our offices grew with them. In addition to the established authors, we've brought you new talent—writers who've distinguished themselves in this field of fiction: Theodore Sturgeon, L. Ron Hubbard, Roger Phillips, Geoff St. Reynard, Charles Myers, H. B. Hickey, to name just a few.

WE APPRECIATE your support through all the years, and will continue to bring you the highest in the field of science-fantasy writing.

SPEAKING of early science-fiction writers, and the part that science-fiction plays in contemporary life—Hugo Gernsback, the first editor of our sister magazine, AMAZING STORIES, and truly called the father of modern science-fiction— made a series of predictions and prognostications in 1911, which have all proven true by 1951. There is the usual radar, television, rocketry, etc., but one of his most startling ideas—when viewed in retrospect—is his description of a metal which he calls *steelonium.* This remarkable substance follows almost perfectly the description of a real present-day metal, titanium. A material which is first coming into use now, and which is superior to even the hypothetical *steelonium* of Mr. Gernsback.

HE ALSO predicted the popularity of night baseball, at a time when technically it would have been impossible to illuminate sufficiently a large area. Magnesium metal is another prediction—and that was at a time when it was used solely for flashlight powder. Hydroponics is another sure hit which Gernsback guessed at. It is startling to think that he could have prophesized so accurately. We should like to hear his predictions for the next fifty years....

YOU'RE CURIOUS about how authors do their writing? Here's an interesting sidelight: Clee Garson literally staggered into our new offices the other day holding out a thick manuscript for the next issue of FA. About the same time that we moved our offices to New York, Clee moved his home here—via automobile. But instead of using the direct route from Chicago to New York, Clee went off the main highway at intervals, stopping in six different cities on the way. He spent a day and a night in each, locked in a hotel room or sitting on a park bench working on the lead novel for April. We found that all this traveling hadn't hurt the composition of the story at all. "Nine Worlds West" contains all the suspense and adventure which we suspect Clee was looking for as he came to each city. Don't miss it on your favorite newsstand, on sale February 20. .....LES

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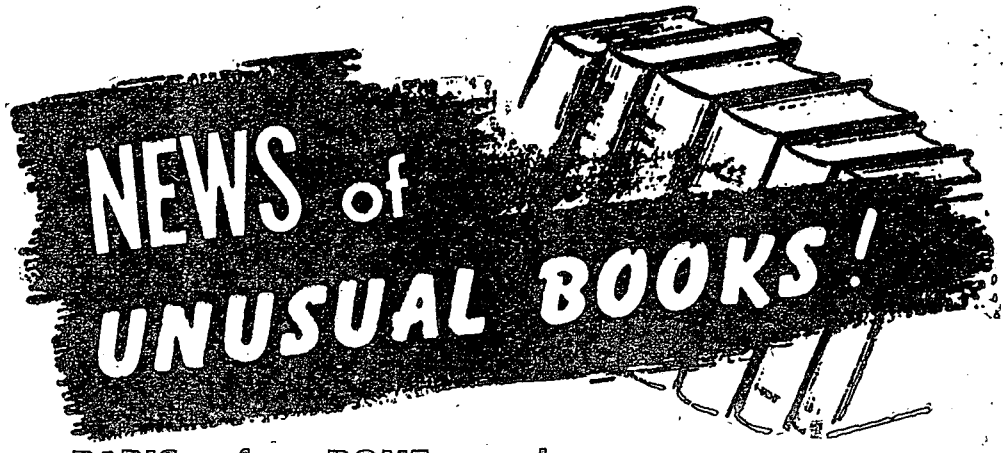

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SECRET of the FLAMING RING

By P. F. Costello

Only when the giant had disappeared from sight did Zeese draw back the ring's cosmic flame

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As an immortal god, Zeese was possessed of great powers. Yet, his very existence depended upon the courage of a mortal

MY MIND flinched as I forced myself to look at the thing facing me. Its sightless, empty sockets that had once held eyes, but which were now deep hollows exaggerating the height of the bridge of the nose. The bloodless lips, their fluidity lost in a set curve of bitterness and cynicism. The ghastly forehead of shining silver that rose from

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the flesh just above the eyebrows, to curve as flesh would curve into a hairline high on the head, with thick brown hair combed to hide where flesh knit itself to metal. The round tube that protruded from that metal forehead, capped with a glistening curved surface of glass like the lens of a camera. The deep hollow in the right cheek that bespoke the absence of bone underneath.

I watched in revulsion as hands reached up and skillfully inserted glass eyes, fingernails gripping and pulling out the lids to allow them to slip in; as those hands slid a plastic pad past opened lips, so that the deep hollow in the cheek took on a more natural shape.

With shaking fingers, I opened the small box I always carried with me, took out two opium pills and swallowed them. I had already taken two, and one was my regular dose.

I looked again at the thing facing me so mutely, its glass eyes staring straight ahead, the lens in its forehead glinting blankly. Slowly, the first two opium pills I had taken fifteen minutes earlier took over, lifting my mind to the lofty plane of impersonalness that was the sole preserve of gods and opium addicts. My lips parted in a mirthless smile, and those of the thing facing me also parted, their smile equally mirthless and bitter.

I watched my changing mood reflected on that ghastly face. In my thoughts, I regarded it more and more impersonally, as the second pair of opium pellets crept through the walls of my stomach into my bloodstream, and thence to my brain.

My smile grew less bitter, more genuine. And that on the face less than two feet away from me reflected my changing mood exactly—as it should—since that face was the reflection of my own in my medicine cabinet mirror, and that round lense that glinted in the center of that silver forehead was the eye with which I saw.

I turned away from the mirror and went through my bedroom into my office. Breakfast was waiting there for me. I forced myself to eat it. I was alone. I always ate alone.

When I had finished, I pressed the buzzer that brought the waiter who took the remains away swiftly, escaping from the sight that made all men flinch.

I watched him come and depart from the security of my lofty position on the mental plane, where the quadruple dose of opium had lifted me. When he had gone, I continued to sit there, behind my desk, neither awake nor asleep. I was utterly relaxed, feeling the utter serenity that is an attribute of the gods course through my being....

I LOOKED up as the door opened, and smiled when I saw that it was Diana, one of the strip tease girls. She left the doorway and crossed hesitantly, to stand on the other side of the desk from me. Her eyes were troubled. There was that tense look to her red lips. I wondered if it might be Renaldo again.

Renaldo was one of Pete Scoffo's boys. He'd been making a play for Diana.

"Renaldo again?" I asked. She shook her head. "Then what?" I asked.

"Maybe I just dropped in to pass the time of day with you," Diana said, hooking a shapely leg on the edge of my desk and sitting there, her body half turned, her lips smiling affectionately at me.

My lips returned her smile. I knew that wasn't the truth. The strip girls liked me. They should, since I was all that stood between them and white slavery on this godforsaken strip of hell. Here, civilization consisted of

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three casinos with all the trimmings, one of which was mine, which I ran from this desk Diana was now holding down so gracefully. But drop in to pass the time of day with me? No. It was too much of an ordeal for them to do that.

I knew how much it cost them—to look at my silver brain pan and the lens in the center of my metal forehead.

"Don't kid me, Diana," I said. "Don't try it. If it isn't Renaldo, it's something else."

She was looking at where my silver brain pan went under the skin just over my eyebrows, and knit to it. That shocked glaze in her eyes told me that. I knew. I felt the same way when I looked in a mirror.

"Diana!" I said sharply.

That snapped her out of it. She took a deep breath, sort of shuddering, and looked away from me.

"Well?" I said.

"There's a new face at the bar lately," she said, holding out a hand and inspecting the flawless, purple enameled nails.

That's the way she would consider it—a new face at the bar. The strip girls went through their routine on the small stage. The bar was a series of connected counters that radiated fanwise from the stage, so that everyone could see without obstruction. The girls saw those faces looking up at them in the subdued lights; saw them and read their stories. They were the same faces every night. When a new one showed up, it stood out like a neon sign in the dark of a Moon crater.

"Yes?" I said. "Probably off the ship that stopped here a few days ago."

We used the same terms we had used back on Earth, because we kept up the same routine. Here on Venus, there was neither night or day, only the same perpetual twilight, unchanging. But our clocks registered Eastern Standard time, the same as New York. When the gay white way of New York turned on its lights, that was when we did, too.

"Not off the ship," Diana said. "He pays for his drinks with platinum *kreps*."

Now, I knew why she was worried.

THE PLATINUM *krep* is a Venusian coin worth about fifty dollars. Back on Earth, they bring twice that, but here on Venus, that's the standard rate of exchange.

It's a peculiar setup, in a way. No trace of the race that minted them on the entire planet. You might find the coins anywhere. They're just a shade smaller than a quarter, and the same thickness, with four letters, the same on each side. The *k* and *r* are over the *e* and *p*. That's why they're called *kreps*.

Nobody knows what those four letters mean. They look very much like ordinary letters, but that's just coincidence, since the Venusian origin would make them have no connection with our own lettering.

Altogether, several tons of them have been found. The first ten pounds brought a fabulous price. After the first ton was unearthed, here and there, it became obvious that there would be plenty more, so the price dropped to the price of the platinum and stayed there.

They became so common that they were used on Venus as much as American dollars for money, but it was rare to find someone using them exclusively. When someone did, it generally meant he had found a cache of them. The jackals then began following him around, and after awhile his body would turn up.

So I knew why Diana was worried. The new face must belong to a nice

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guy. Nice guys don't last long on Venus. Especially if they seem to know where maybe a ton or so of *kreps* are hidden, and stagger off with a load of rouell under their belts to replenish their buying power.

And rouell, in case you don't know, is the drug that has the same effect on the human body as alcohol. It is to alcohol what saccharine is to sugar. A pound of rouell and some artificial flavorings, plus lots of water, makes almost any kind of drink. When you have to include interplanetary postage and freight rates, it makes the difference between a reasonably priced drink and one nobody could afford at any price. I sell rouell beer, equivalent to the best natural beer sold on Earth, for twenty-five dollars a glass. That includes the floor show—the strip tease—which is the only kind of show men are interested in out here.

And into this setup, a new face had appeared. A face that appealed to Diana. A face that probably looked up at her and through her to some dream of the past—and grimy hands that dropped *kreps* on the glistening plastic of the bar in exchange for drinks.

"Have you tried learning anything about this guy?" I asked.

"I haven't had a chance, Joe," Diana said. "And I'm afraid I won't get one. Renaldo."

"I see," I said. "I might have to have something done about Renaldo. On your way out, tell Blacky to come in. I'll find out about the stranger for you and let you know."

"OK, Joe," Diana said. "And thanks." There was relief in her eyes as she turned away from me and left.

BLACKY was my right hand man. His real name was James G. Whitcomb, but even in the Service he had been known as Blacky. We'd been in that smashup together, the one that left me like I am. He'd come out lucky—physically—but with the unshakable conviction that what had happened to me was his fault. That's what hindsight judgment does to a guy, because only God could have guessed the timing of things right, and Blacky wasn't God.

When I had picked this concession on Venus, Blacky had requested and been given an indefinite leave of absence from active duty in the Space Patrol, and had simply come along with me.

I found out soon enough that I couldn't succeed without him. Help wouldn't stick with me if they had to see my face every day. Blacky could stand it. So he sort of ran things for me—but always in a way where I made the decisions. To him, I was boss—and so I was boss to the rest of the help.

I think that without him, I would have quickly gone insane, and he knew it.

He came in less than five minutes after Diana left. His eyes held only curiosity as to what was on my mind. I might have been just a perfectly normal appearing guy for all I could get out of his glance as his eyes rested on me.

"Diana says you want me," he said.

"I do. I hear there's a new face at the bar, spending *kreps*. Diana's interested in him. What's he like?"

"I noticed him, of course," Blacky said. "Nice build. Might have been an athlete in school, and not out of school too many years. Civilian manners. Was intelligent once. Dreams gone. You know the type. Like a boat floating down the river with no one in it."

"Yeah," I said. I knew.

"I've watched him. Tried to figure him out," Blacky went on. "Funny guy. He sits there and dawdles over his beer. He looks up once at each

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girl that comes out for her dance, then turns away. All except Diana. He watches her. Funny thing there, too. He just watches her face. Stares at it like he was hypnotized."

"Maybe he knows her," I suggested.

"If he does," Blacky said. "Why doesn't he make the normal play? Hunt her up when she's mixing, and give her the old line about remember me when we went to school together?"

"Where's he staying?" I asked.

"Next door," Blacky answered.

"Good enough," I answered, and it was. I owned the hotel next door. I could keep track of him and see he didn't get it in his room some night.

"Anything more?" Blacky asked.

"Yeah," I said. "Bring me some of the *kreps* he's been spending. Be sure they're the ones he's passed."

"I anticipated that one," Blacky said, handing me a handful of the platinum coins. "I've been having the bar boys give them to me for two days now."

"What a drinker," I said dryly, hefting the coins. There were forty of them, and at two drinks for one coin, that meant forty glasses of rouell beer a day. Ten days more of that could produce some awful results. "Keep him under your wing, Blacky. I may want to see him in a little while."

I WAITED until Blacky had left before rising from my desk and crossing the door to my little private lab.

In the lab, I spread the forty *kreps* out on the table and inspected them with a magnifying glass. Very few people knew it, but there were several kinds of these coins. The differences were minute, but distinct. They could mean anything. Though they might actually be nothing more than the distinctive differences between separate stamping dies. No one knew, of course.

But I saw right away that these forty *kreps* were different than any I had run across before. I took out my Grandville, the accepted authority on Venus, to make absolutely sure. There was no mistake. The *k* had a little curve in the long line that wasn't on any known *krep*.

It was entirely possible that someone might go out in back of my casino and kick up the flaky Venusian soil and uncover a handful of these very coins with their new marking that I had never encountered before.

But that wasn't likely. The country had been pretty well combed within a radius of a hundred miles of the settlement. Everything was covered with the soil and unholy vegetation of the jungle, but easily uncovered—and more easily spotted with the metal detectors. It was accepted by authorities that this area had been one of the last occupied by the Venusians, and was therefore the most recent.

These particular coins, being different, might have come from an older place, farther away. There might even be artifacts that would tell us more about the vanished race.

My interest in the stranger suddenly increased. I knew I would have to talk to him and find out.

I left the *kreps* laying there, returned to my office and sat down behind the desk and waited. While I waited, I thought about things.

VENUS HAD been reached by spaceship in 1965. In the fifty years since that first landing, several dozen settlements had been born. There wasn't really any reason for them except as a place to exist for those who, from the comfortable discomfort of Earth, had sought Adven-

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ture and Romance and Fame on Venus. When they got there, they generally didn't have enough sense to go back home, at first. Later, they didn't have enough will power.

Whatever Danger lurked in the untamed jungles of Venus could be met adequately with a Flit gun and a needle of penicillin. Whatever Romance there was on Venus was on the sordid level of cash in advance. Even that was out in my own casino. My strip girls got paid well just for their dance. Five dollars from every drink went into their salaries, and into bank accounts back on Wall Street, New York, so that they could look forward to security in a few years without having to sell their souls down the Styx.

But that was true only in the Gardena. In the other two casinos—Pete Scoffo's Limbo Casino, and Nick Pampolos' Shangri La—bright-eyed young misses periodically replaced wornout, disillusioned, soulless hulks of young-old female humanity who were then either returned home, or sent to a hospital while their minds and bodies rotted from disease.

And what of Fame? Venus had its pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, just like every frontier had had since Adam's sons first looked beyond Eden. There would be undying Fame for the first lucky man who found some cavern or uncovered some buried crypt that contained the remains of a native Venusian.

There were the coins, the *kreps*. There were the stainless steel utensils, the rusted remains of metal objects that seemed to be everything from floor lamps to automatic dishwashers. There were the positive indications that the Venusians had been a highly civilized race with electric power.

But there were no books, no pictures, no statues, no bones. Nothing. For all anyone knew, the Venusians might have been boneless slugs that dissolved into the soil when they died.

SO MEN WHO believed all adventure was in the field across the road, came to Venus to look. And in the depressing dampness of the dripping jungles, they steeped their nervous systems in rouell until they died, or went insane and were shipped back to Earth in straight jackets.

There were the jackals like Renaldo, who came to make money any way they could without working for it—and did. They played in the card games and cheated for a percentage. Where they could get away with it, they robbed outright; derelict men or girls, it made no difference.

They existed only because Pete Scoffo and Nick Pampolos had a use for them.

So there was Pete and Nick.

And there was me. A strange contrast, in a way. Two men, handsome and well proportioned, but with distorted and corrupt souls, that grew fatter on the misery and calamity of their fellows. I, with a distorted and corrupted shell that turned a man's stomach to look at, but the only haven of mercy for the weak to turn to.

I laughed without humor. Once, Pete and Nick had come to face me—me, Joe Grimm! It was to have been a showdown over my "stealing" two of their imported girls who had thrown themselves from second-story windows of their hotel prisons, risking death to get away.

Pete and Nick had called politely, and said they merely wished to see me to discuss a few things. They'd left their guns at the bar and come into my office unarmed.

I had made them wait five minutes —while I took out my teeth and the

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cheekpad, and took off the shoulder brace that serves to hold my right arm into a semblance of its proper position. I slipped the two dirty-yellow glass eyes into my empty sockets. I'd had those two eyes made in anticipation of the moment.

It was the only time I've ever taken pleasure in the reaction my appearance caused in others. I was ashamed of myself, but Pete Scoffo and Nick Pampolos left me and mine alone after that. Only their jackals, like Renaldo, came around. But Blacky and his boys could handle them.

My thoughts now turned to Diana and the eleven other girls on my strip revue. They were a symbol of the Race. It's hard to put over the necessity of that.

Men came and sat at the bar and drank rouell and watched with hopeless eyes. Then, they left after a time and disappeared in the jungles, to turn up weeks or months later with the things they could trade for money —or with their pockets weighted with *kreps* from some cache they had discovered.

But the girls themselves, they had come because they were promised great riches in a couple of years of harmless strip-tease. Perhaps only I kept that promise, but there again, strangely enough, I was the only one who never made that promise. Every one of my girls had come first to some other casino—the Limbo or the Shangri La, or from one in some other settlement. They had somehow managed to escape and find refuge with me, the horror in their minds gradually forgotten.

DIANA WAS the only exception. She had shown up almost a year before and insisted on seeing me personally, said her sister had told her about me. She said she had just arrived on the local plane from the spaceport.

Blacky had come in and told me about her, and that she wanted to see me. I told him to tell her she could go to work, but I wouldn't see her. She'd sent word back that she wouldn't work for me unless she could see me.

Well, it was quite a shock to her. She couldn't quite hide it, game though she was. I'd stood there in the middle of my office while she forced her eyes to keep looking at me like there was nothing wrong with my appearance.

I'd stood there, a silly smile on my lips, waiting. I knew what I could expect. One of two things: Either she'd break, and run gibbering from the room and from me, the nightmare; or a look of pity would come into her eyes.

But I'd been wrong. The first shocked glaze of her eyes at seeing me had slowly gone away to be replaced by a voiceless wonder—and something else. It was a religious tribute to the miracles of modern surgery that could take a piece of hamburger that had been a man and make it live on. Maybe there was a little admiration in it for the piece of hamburger that had the will to live on. I wasn't sure.

Anyway, she had gone to work for me, and forced herself to drop into my office occasionally and talk to me and act like nothing was wrong with me.

She was a real woman. I often wondered why Blacky didn't make a play for her. I even broached the subject to him once, half jokingly. He looked at me queerly and changed the subject. The grotesque thought had come to me that he *had* made a play for her and she had told him she was in love with me! *Me!*

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CHAPTER II

THE STRANGER came into my office quite unwillingly, to say the least. Blacky and three of his aides brought him in. But once in, the sight of me was like an ice cold shower to his rouell-fogged brain.

He stood there, swaying slightly, blinking. Finally, he shook his head like a wet dog shakes its body. His hair made me think of that comparison. It was too long, and coal black. Glistening.

"Your name?" I asked coldly.

"Oh," he said. I could see the thought in his mind. It was, "It can speak!" He swallowed painfully and said, "None of your business. Since when does a man have to give his name in a dive like this?"

He was looking at my obviously glass eyes with a drunken smile of confidence.

"Since right now," I said. "And in case you think I don't see you, let me assure you that this camera-like contraption on my forehead is a very good eye. Perhaps better, since its color separation is optical rather than biochemical. Right this minute, you were looking at my glass eyes. Now, you are chewing your lip."

"I've heard of you," he said, slightly angry. "In fact, I've read the three books on your eye."

"Oh?" I said encouragingly. He didn't rise to that, so I said, "The reason I wanted to see you was because I'm curious about the *kreps* you've been paying your beer with."

"Pretty good counterfeits, aren't they?" he sneered.

"Sure, sure." I smiled. "I'll give you fifty genuine ones for every one I see you stamp out. Is it a deal?"

His shoulders sagged a little. "So what?" he said. "They're genuine. Anything wrong with them?"

"A few things," I said slowly, watching him closely. I felt that I would learn more from his expressions than his words. His face was too expressive not to betray him in a lie. "What's your name?" I shot at him suddenly.

"Fred Murdock," he said without thinking—and I knew at once it was his real name and that he regretted giving it out. "What's wrong with them?" he asked defiantly.

"Let's see if I can make you understand," I said.

There was a sound over by the door, and Diana walked in. As she passed Murdock, she looked straight into his eyes. He returned the stare, seeming to hold his breath the while. Finally, she pulled her eyes away and smiled at me with an effort at casualness.

"To get back to the subject," I said, "there are two major things wrong with the *kreps* you've been spending here. One, they are slightly different than any other *krep* so far discovered. Second, microscopic examination of the crystalization shows that they were stamped out less than fifty years ago, while all others discovered were stamped at least a few hundred years back."

His face became a blank mask.

"I doubt if anyone would bring raw platinum from Earth to Venus and stamp out *kreps* to waste on rouell beer," I went on slowly. "The only sensible conclusion I can come to is that they were coined by living, native Venusians—and that you found where they live, and stole the *kreps* from them!"

He looked at me incredulously, as if I were insane, but I saw what I wanted to see in the back of his eyes.

"Are you crazy?" he asked.

"Look," I said, "I'm not a crook. I'm maybe the only guy on Venus who would help you and not ask anything for doing it. If you've found a

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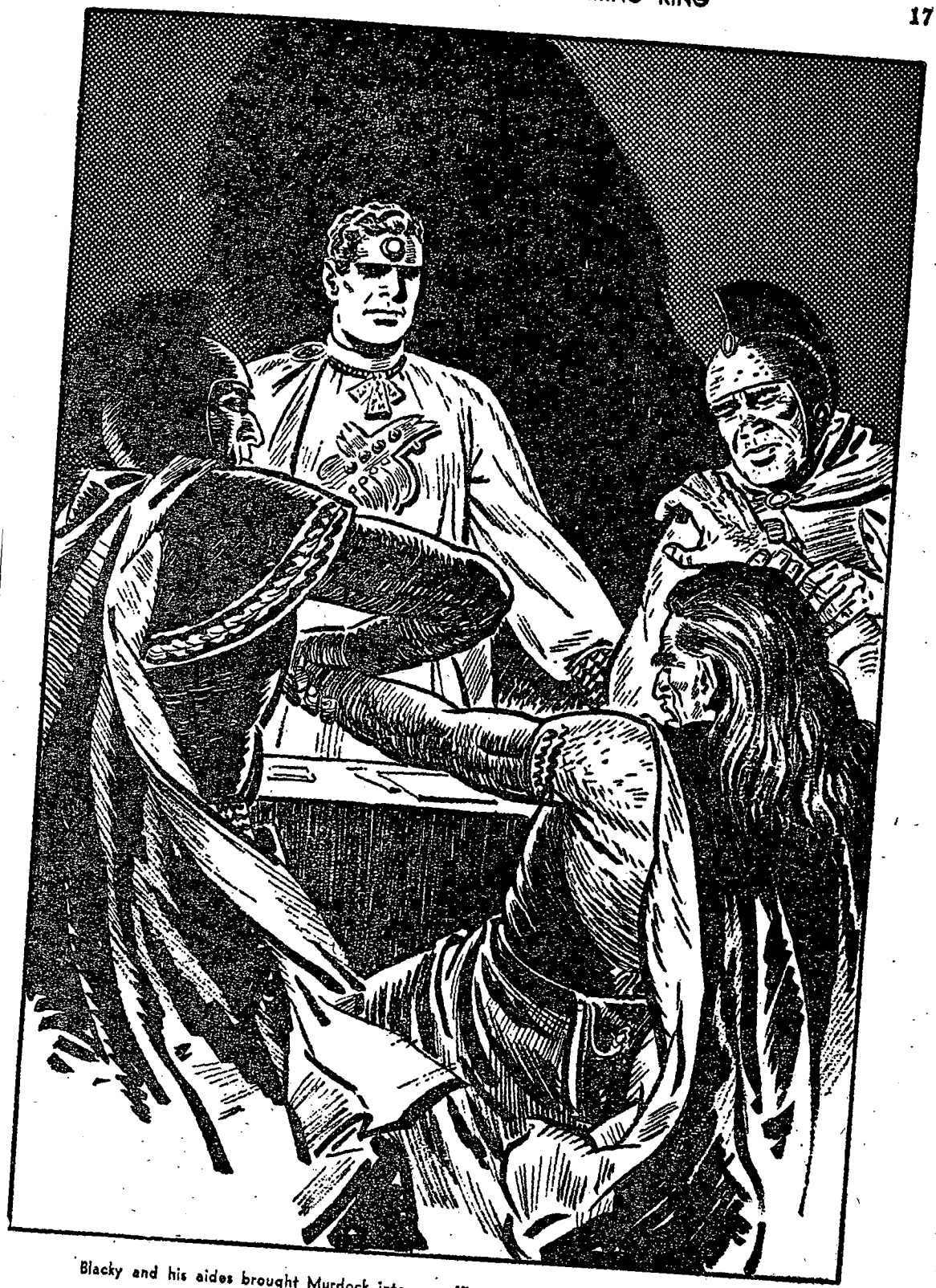

Blacky and his aides brought Murdock into my office. He came quite unwillingly, to say the least

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place where live Venusians are, tell me, and I'll see that you get full recognition as the discoverer. Not only that, I'll see that you get back to Earth a millionaire."

He stared at me for a full minute. Then he said, "You go to hell."

He turned and started for the door. Blacky made to grab him, but I shook my head. He brushed past Diana without a glance and slammed the door as he went out.

"What was the idea?" Blacky asked.

I was looking at Diana, who was staring at the closed door. "Give him time to think," I said gruffly. I went into my lab and closed the door. I didn't want to talk to Diana right then.

IT WAS almost closing time, two in the morning, when there was a timid knock on the door and the sad-eyed redhead, Gertrude, came in.

"I overheard something I think you ought to know," she said defiantly, knowing that I usually kicked tale bearers out before they could spill their guts.

It had been about a year and a half before that Blacky and a few of the boys had rescued Gertrude from the door of the Limbo Casino. She had escaped and run into the street and been caught, and was being dragged back in.

"Have a drink, Gerty," I said kindly. She shook her head. "Have a seat then," I laughed. "What did you overhear?"

"The new guy," Gertrude blurted. "The one with the wavy black hair. I overheard him talking to Diana. I didn't deliberately eavesdrop. I was sitting at the bar with a customer, and he stopped with his back to me and reached out when Diana was passing him, and talked to her quickly."

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'You've got to come away with me, Diana.' And she said, 'You fool, get out of my way. Get out of here and never come back.' That's what she said."

I digested that slowly and sat back, feeling easier. So Diana had told him to scram. But what good did that do me? None. Except that it meant she would probably stay on working for me.

"Thanks, Gertrude," I said. I pulled open a drawer and took out the ledger book. "That gives you a hundred dollars added to your account in New York." I wrote it down.

"Thanks. But you don't need to do that. I wouldn't have said anything, but I had a feeling about it."

"Feeling?" I echoed. "What do you mean?"

"I had a feeling that Diana and that guy know each other. Just the way they talked. The way Diana said, 'You fool' wasn't the way you'd say it to a bum, but the way you'd say it to someone you knew well enough to make it mean just that."

I COULD see what she meant, and see that maybe she was right. I remembered the way Diana and Fred Murdock had looked at each other in my office.

"And?" I prompted.

"If that's the case, he might make trouble for her," Gertrude went on. "He had that look in his eye. A guy that can come all the way from Earth after the girl that jilted him, could do something desperate after being told to get out like that. That's why I thought I should say something. I know Diana wouldn't, and I'm afraid that guy might hurt her."

"Tell Blacky I want to see him on your way out," I said. "I'll tell him to keep an eye open for trouble that way."

"Thanks, Joe," Gertrude said. From

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the relief in her voice, I knew it had been more of a worry than she had let on.

Blacky came in right away. "Gertrude said you wanted me," he said. "What's up?"

I told him what Gertrude had reported. I concluded with, "Well, what's your opinion? Do you think Fred Murdock is Diana's ex-boyfriend?"

Blacky shook his head. "Could be, but I don't think so. He might be her brother. I'd put my money on that, rather than the other."

"Why?"

"The way he looks at her," Blacky explained. "He looks at her like she didn't have a body. You know. Sits there and stares at her face during her dance. But even so, I don't think he knew her before he showed up here. It doesn't hold water that he came from Earth to talk her into going back with him."

"Why not?"

"Where'd he get the *kreps?*" Blacky asked. "Can you imagine him coming here to talk Diana into going back with him, but pausing a few months to look for *kreps* to drink himself silly with first? I can't."

"It doesn't sound likely," I admitted. "But can you imagine a guy that never spoke to a girl before, stopping her and saying, 'You've got to come away with me, Diana.'"

"I never thought of that," Blacky frowned. "It sounds cockeyed. But even so, it's more possible for a stranger to sit there until he imagines he knows her, than it is for a boyfriend hell bent to save her from the life of a dancer to go out and prospect for *kreps* first. And those *kreps* ...was it true what you said, that they must have been minted in the last fifty years?"

"I think so," I said. "I'm no expert, but that's the way it seems to me. I'm sending some of them to New York to a laboratory where they can check up on the crystalization. It'll be several months before I hear from them, probably."

"In that time, Fred Murdock could drink himself to death without half trying," Blacky said dryly. "What should I do? Kick him out of the settlement? Or I could have some of the boys keep an eye on him night and day."

"That would be better," I told him. "Night and day. Move whoever's in the room across the hall from him in the hotel, and have a couple of the boys watch all night."

DIANA DIDN'T come in after work like she sometimes did, to smile at me and give me a casual, "Goodnight, Joe." I was glad. If she had come in, I might have asked her about Fred Murdock, and I didn't want to. It was too much like sticking my nose into other people's business without their permission—and it would have killed me to have Diana tell me to mind my own business.

The only thing on which Pete Scoffo, Nick Pampolos and I were in agreement was closing hours, but that was a vital thing. With all three casinos closed, the population of the settlement naturally went to their respective rooms and slept it off. That way, a normal day was maintained.

I slept, too, and for the first time in several days, I didn't have a single ache to torture me. I put the metal cover over my eye lens, and lay in silence in my soundproof bedroom off my office and laboratory. I mulled over the mystery of those *kreps*. The next thing I knew, the chimes of my alarm clock were waking me.

I felt swell. My regular morning opium tablet made me feel even better. I was humming one of the tunes Marty and his orchestra boys play

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for Diana's dance when Blacky came in. I looked at his reflection in the mirror and stopped humming.

He was chewing his lip and looking at my back, not noticing that I could see him in the mirror.

"Joe," he said, sounding doubtful or maybe hesitant.

"What's the matter with you this morning, Blacky?" I said kiddingly, shutting off the shaver and turning to face him.

"Diana's gone," he said in the same tone of voice he would have used to say, "I can't find my collar button."

I STOOPED down to pick up the pieces of the electric shaver. It had hit the washbasin as it slipped from my fingers. Blacky was over at once, helping me. We concentrated on the shaver, inspecting it, discussing whether it would still work.

"If it won't work, I'll loan you mine until the plane comes next week," Blacky said.

Then, my mind had recovered enough so I could face what he had said about Diana.

"You said Diana's gone?"

"Yes," Blacky said. "Gertrude knocked on her door to ask her to have breakfast with her. She says the door came open when she knocked. She pushed it open a little farther and saw the bed all made up. She went in, and Diana wasn't there."

"That's all?" I asked. At Blacky's nod, I said, "Let's go over and take a look. What'd your boys report on Fred Murdock?"

"He's still in his room," Blacky said. "Went there right from the bar last night and hasn't come out since."

"Sure?" I persisted.

"We can make sure," Blacky said.

We did that before going into Diana's room. I used my master key to open Murdock's door very quietly. He was on his bed, dressed, but dead to the world. In sleep, his handsome face looked like that of a petulant child.

I closed the door after a swift look around, and we went back down to the second floor to Diana's room. The door was still open, but we found Gertrude waiting inside.

"Find anything?" I asked, wishing she weren't there. I wanted to be alone—or at least away from dames that had "feelings" by which they might divine the fact that I loved Diana. I didn't want anyone ever to know that.

"I didn't look," Gertrude said. "That's not my job."

"That's right," I said. "You can go now." I waited until she had gone, then I got to work.

HER CLOTHES, so far as I could tell, were all there. Blacky stood in the middle of the room and very wisely said and did nothing, waiting for orders. I didn't give any. I was doing this by myself.

Then, I found the arrow.

It was in the back of the bottom drawer of the dresser beneath some folded nightgowns. I took it out, and Blacky and I looked at it.

I'd done a little archery myself in my younger days, and knew a little about arrows. This one was no ordinary arrow, designed to shoot into a bale of straw.

It had a murderous metal head on it, needle sharp with four knife-edged vanes, able to cut clear through a man at ordinary speeds. The shaft was of a very fine grained wood.

But it was the feather vanes which fixed our attention. They were not of bird feathers. That wasn't noticeable at first glance, though, because they were brightly colored, crimson, with little pearl-like speckles. A bird feather has hairs on it that are all separate like the teeth of a comb, and

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straight. These were not that way. The fine tendrils grew together instead of being separate. They were something like the veining of a leaf.

"It looks like a tanned and colored leaf, trimmed to act as vanes," Black said.

"Tanned," I said. "That's the right word."

I examined the sharp metal head of the arrow again. The metal looked like platinum, but might be any one of several alloys.

"Too bad she didn't leave a note," Blacky said. "Undoubtedly, what she's done is hiked to the next settlement. She could make it all right. Even live off fruits and berries and hike all the way to the spaceport."

"She did leave a note," I said.

"Huh?" Blacky was startled.

"The arrow," I added. "Where do they tan leaves to use on arrows?"

"I don't know," Blacky said. "No place that I ever heard of."

"That's right," I agreed. "So we can be sure this arrow is a product of Venus. Diana is a Venusian."

I tossed the arrow. Within two feet it straightened out, and when it hit the wall, its sharp point sunk in so that it stood out perfectly straight.

"Then—" Blacky started for the door.

"Wait a minute," I stopped him. "I'm way ahead of you. Fred Murdock's a Venusian too; but let's let him sleep while we figure out a few things."

"But he might get away," Blacky objected.

"Not as long as he doesn't know Diana's gone," I said.

BLACKY turned back into the room reluctantly.

"I suspected him," I said. "Those *kreps*. It isn't likely an Earth man would discover live Venusians and then just quietly slip into a settlement and say nothing about it, even when he's drunk. But I didn't suspect Diana of being one." I went over and pulled the arrow loose.

"Did you ever see such an arrow?" I said. "You wouldn't really need a bow with one of these. You could throw it hard enough to kill a man. With a little practice, you could hit a running man at fifty feet with one."

"If Diana's a Venusian," Blacky asked, "why did she dance here? I know it would have been easy for her to get in here. But why?"

"I don't know," I said. "Sure it was easy. I believed her story about her sister telling her to come here to make a fortune. Why shouldn't I? And why should I even check up on ship passengers to find out if she was listed? It wouldn't occur to me or anyone else that she hadn't come from Earth."

"Boy!" Blacky whistled. "So Venusians are people just like us. And we have one of them—Fred Murdock!"

"Let's go back to the office," I said. "I've got an idea."

I locked the door and we went over into the Casino and into my office. I took the arrow into my lab and locked it in the safe.

"What's this idea?" Blacky asked.

"If Fred Murdock, or whatever his real name is, finds out that Diana has simply lammed out of here," I explained, "he'll get out himself. Probably go to wherever it is the Venusians live."

"Then we can follow him," Blacky said quickly.

"And lose him. Suppose we tell him that we shipped Diana someplace else? Mars, for instance? That will complicate things for him. He won't just try to get back home then. Maybe he'll even play ball with us to get her back, and we can find where the Venusians are."

"It's a nice idea," Blacky said. "I'd

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better warn Gerty not to talk."

"And have Myrtle announce that Diana has gone to Mars," I said. Myrtle is our mistress of ceremonies. She introduces each girl before her dance and asks the bleary-eyed customers to "give the little lady a hand".

"What if Diana comes back?" Blacky asked suddenly. "I can't see her just running out without saying goodbye to you, Joe. She likes you."

That's what I love about Blacky. He always says just the right thing to make me feel better.

"How do you know whether a Venusian woman likes me?" I asked harshly. "She was a spy, wasn't she?"

"I'll get to Gertrude and Myrtle." Blacky left quickly.

I paced the floor, cursing bitterly at having given away that it meant something to me. I was being a fool. Diana had gone, and I wanted to find her, follow her. What would I do when I found her? I didn't know.

I didn't care whether humanity discovered the Venusians or not. All I cared about was finding Diana. The only way I could do that was by working on Fred Murdock.

IT WAS AN hour after the Casino opened that he came bursting into my office without knocking—and Blacky right after him.

He brought up short in the middle of the room. Blacky got to him and put on a wristlock, holding it just tight enough to let Fred Murdock know he could apply pressure quick.

"What have you done to her?" Fred asked. "She wouldn't have gone of her own free will!"

"Now, Mr. Murdock," I said, bowing slightly and smiling like Pete Scoffo would do. "She was under contract to me. I merely sold her contract to a friend of mine from Mars, who was here last night after closing time. She objected to going...a little. But after all..." I spread my hands with a gesture implying that she was in no position to argue.

"You inhuman, metal-capped beast!" Murdock said, with more real hate in his voice than I had ever heard in any voice before.

It almost made me relent and reassure him of the truth; but then, he wouldn't cooperate. Instead, I put on an outraged expression. "I'm getting tired of this tramp," I said to Blacky. "Kick him out. I don't want him around."

"Don't worry," Murdock said. "I wouldn't stay here another minute. But tell me where on Mars she's going to be."

"How do I know?" I shrugged. "Maybe he won't even take her there. Maybe he had a crush on her, and will keep her on his private space-yacht for his own amusement."

That was cruel. But it worked.

"Look," Murdock said, "I'll lay my cards on the table. Diana isn't what you think she is. She's a—a—"

"A what?"

The mad light in his eyes flared, then died to smouldering fires. "What would you say," he asked me softly, "if I told you that Diana is almost three thousand years old?"

I laughed like it was a good joke. Blacky joined in. But something in me was turning over, and if it wasn't my stomach, it was the next thing to it.

"I'll have to tell my friend from Mars she's that old," I said. Then I added another cruel dart: "After he's had her a while."

BLACKY HAD to use the wristlock and put an arm choke hold on to keep it.

"You cheap, warped scum," Murdock ground out. "Don't you realize what you've done? Diana is—Diana!"

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"Don't go calling me a scum, you cheap rouell sop," I spoke with convincing anger. "The stuff's affected your mind. Diana is Diana. Huh! I don't care if Diana is Diana is Diana. I made ten thousand dollars on the deal. So get out of here and forget about it. Get yourself another girl when you get straightened around. If you're broke, I'll buy your ticket back to Earth."

"Ten thousand?" He said it incredulously. "Money?" The idea hadn't occurred to him. It soaked in now, like water soaking into the parched lips of a dying man on the desert. "Look. I'll pay you twenty thousand to get her back. Fifty thousand. A hundred. Whatever you say. I'll have it here in two days. Only, you'd better have her back when I get here with it. Understand?"

I sucked on my lip like Pete Scoffo does when he's considering something. Then, I tried to look suspicious. "A hundred thousand," I said slowly. "Where would you get that much?"

"I'll get it," Murdock said.

"What in?" I asked, pretending disbelief. *"Kreps?"*

He nodded.

"Suppose you didn't show up with the money?" I asked. "I'd have to pay my friend maybe twenty thousand to buy back her contract. I'd be out ten thousand."

"You'll have to trust me," he said desperately. "I give you my word."

"The word of a rouell addict?" I scoffed. "I'll tell you what I'll do, though. I'll agree to it if you'll take three of my boys along with you to make sure you get back. That way, if you don't, I can get my loss back out of your hide."

"I can't do that!" Murdock said desperately. "I'll have to go alone."

"Afraid we'll find out where it is?"

"Call it that if you wish," he said stiffly.

"Then the deal's off." I shrugged. "Frankly, I don't think you can lay your hands on a hundred thousand in *kreps*. And anyway, do you realize it would take a truck to bring it here from wherever it is?"

"No, it wouldn't," Murdock said. "A hundred thousand dollars would be two thousand *kreps*, and I could carry them alone."

"What do you mean, a hundred thousand dollars?" I snarled. "The deal was a hundred thousand *kreps*. Nothing was said about dollars."

I watched his shoulders sag. For a second, I felt ashamed of myself. But then, I remembered that it wasn't true that I had sold Diana. She was gone, and I was only trying to force Murdock into leading me to the place where she had gone. That would be the only place he could hope to get a hundred thousand *kreps*.

He opened his mouth and closed it several times. Sweat was beginning to come out on his forehead. I decided to drive my advantage while I had it.

"Is it a deal, or do I have Blacky kick you out into the street?" I demanded. "And even if it's a deal, I don't trust you, now that you tried to renege on your offer. I'll radio my friend to hold up two days, and I'm coming along with plenty of men to make sure you go through with it."

"OK," he said bitterly. "It's a deal."

"Take him out of here, Blacky, while I radio my friend's ship at the spaceport. Then, we're going after that money. Don't let him out of your sight, and don't let him talk to anybody. We don't want any hitch."

Blacky winked at me over Fred Murdock's shoulder and released him. I waited until they had gone, then went about making arrangements for the hotel and casino.

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CHAPTER III

LIVING IN the little world of the Gardena Casino and its hotel, one forgets the details of the Venusian jungle landscape. The ground on Venus is springy, being practically nothing but decaying vegetation for many feet down. The Leper Trees with their dull white limbs and thick, pulpy leaves, form a ceiling to the corridors that wind under them with little or no obstruction from underbrush.

Above all this is the eternal wind, but in these hush corridors there is no breath of air. There are insects. Countless millions of them. Nor are there any birds to keep their numbers down. Animals and birds and all creatures of flesh and bone are unknown to Venus—or had been up to now—aside from the people that came here from Earth.

It was rare that the insects bothered with men, though. Their whole life cycle was centered around the Leper Trees and their juicy leaves, which served both as food and a place to lay eggs.

It had been years since I had walked in the jungle. I had thought then that it was more like a quiet graveyard than anything I had ever seen.

I still thought so as I walked along, flanked by several of Blacky's boys, following the defeated figure of Fred Murdock.

Blacky had taken no chances. Fred Murdock was handcuffed to two of the men, with three-foot lightweight chains between the cuffs so they would allow plenty of freedom. The two walked behind him. Blacky walked beside him as we went farther and farther into the jungle.

I went up to Murdock and bent over to whisper in his ear: "How much farther?"

"Maybe five hours walk," he said.

Murdock curved to the right from the straight line path we had followed from the settlement. I had more or less expected this. I hadn't thought he would be foolish enough to start out from the settlement on a straight-line path to our destination. Also, if he could have gotten there and back in two days by himself, we had not followed the path he would have taken alone, or we would have reached the place the night before.

IT WAS SHORTLY after turning that Blacky spied the body off to the side. The others ahead of us, Murdock included, had missed it—and we didn't say anything. Blacky just stopped me and pointed. Then, we went over to look.

"It's one of Scoffo's boys!" Blacky said as we stopped beside it. It was laying on its stomach, the face half turned.

He turned the body over with his foot. The broken shaft of an arrow protruded from the chest. The other half of the arrow was laying on the ground under the body.

I picked it up. It was a mate to the one back in my safe, taken from Diana's room.

Blacky tried to pull the arrow from the body. It was lodged solidly. "The point must be stuck in a vertebrae," Blacky said. "Do you suppose Diana did this?"

"I hope not," I said. "I can't imagine her killing anyone. Just the same, it's a good thing Murdock didn't see this. If it was Diana, he would know it—and realize we were kidding him. Then, he would refuse to take us farther."

"We'd better catch up," Blacky said. We went back to the trail and walked swiftly. "I hope one of those arrows doesn't find its way into me," he added as we caught up.

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"Maybe Renaldo circled us and laid a trap for us," I thought aloud. "If so, he couldn't have known we'd change our direction, so it's failed."

"I wonder why that fellow was killed?" Blacky muttered nervously. "It doesn't seem to make sense."

"An awful lot hasn't made sense lately, starting with Murdock and the coins he used to buy drinks with," I said. "But if we're near the hide-out of the Venusians, it's possible that in scouting around, this guy accidentally stumbled into one of the Venusians out for a stroll, and tried to take him, or her."

"Or he was following us," Blacky said. "I wonder if we'll be welcome. Isn't it hoping for too much to think that Diana can make us welcome—if she's here? How do you know we won't get the same treatment?"

"I don't," I said flatly. "But if we get a chance, I'll try to prove to them that we didn't actually come after riches, or even to discover their hide-out. And we'll keep it secret if they want us to."

"I think sometimes you believe in Santa Claus," Blacky was skeptical.

"So do you," I grinned. "Or you wouldn't have quit a nice future to come with me.

"Quit a nice future is right," Blacky said. "If those arrows start flying. They're about the most—"

He drew in his breath sharply. I looked at him quickly, then followed the direction of his eyes. I could see nothing to have caused that gasp of surprise.

"What is is?" I asked softly.

Blacky's features slowly relaxed. "Nothing," he said. "It couldn't have been anything. Just a trick of light and shadow."

"Well, what did it look like?" I persisted.

"Hard to say," Blacky said. "Looked for a second like a dwarf with red trunks on, and the pinkest skin I ever saw, and two short horns growing up just at the scalp line. Realistic as the very devil. But impossible." He felt reassuringly of his gun in its flat shoulder holster.

I looked at Blacky keenly. I knew he wasn't the kind to imagine things. I was more willing to accept the evidence of his senses than he was. "I think it's time we had a little talk with Murdock," I said, making up my mind suddenly.

WE HASTENED our steps until we were at the head of the procession.

"I want to have a talk with you before we go any farther, Murdock," I said. "I want some straight answers to some straight questions."

Fred Murdock stopped and sat down on the ground with his back to a tree. I squatted in front of him. Blacky motioned the others to spread out and keep a sharp lookout.

"What're your questions?" Murdock was sullen.

"Are you an Earthman—or a Venusian?" I asked bluntly.

"What's your next question?" he asked.

"You haven't answered the first one yet," I said sharply.

"That's right, I haven't," he was calm. "I might not answer any of them, but let's hear them."

"This place we're going to," I said. "Is it just a cache of *kreps*, or is it a place where Venusians live? In other words, are we going to meet some of your pals?"

"Any more?" Murdock sneered.

"Yes," I said. "Did you ever see a pink-skinned dwarf with short horns growing at his scalp line?"

"So you drink rouell, too," he jeered.

"Very seldom."

"Suppose your questions don't

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mean a thing to me?" he asked.

"That's possible," I said. "One more, then. Did you ever see arrows on Venus? Arrows so delicately balanced that you could kill a man just by throwing one at him?"

He opened his mouth as if to interrupt when I first mentioned arrows, then left it open as I finished. His skin turned a shade paler than it had been. "Where did you see an arrow like that?" he asked harshly.

I looked up at Blacky triumphantly. "Oh, I ran across one in Diana's things after she was gone."

"Only one?" he asked, then bit his lips as if regretting the question.

"There might be more," I said casually. "I was just getting some of her underthings to give to one of the other girls, and ran across it in a dresser drawer."

I STUDIED him closely. I felt that I was skating awfully close to thin edge in some way. Maybe I had even skated too close.

Murdock looked around slowly, licking his lips nervously. His eyes seemed to be searching through the trees. He struggled up without speaking. "Shall we start on?" he asked dryly.

"You aren't going to answer my questions?"

"No." His lips curled in contempt. He brushed by me and started on.

The two men he was handcuffed to started to follow him. I motioned them to stand still. Murdock came to the end of the chains. He hadn't expected that, and jerked back off balance, sitting on the ground with a dull thud.

I stepped around in front of him and looked down at him.

"You aren't going to answer my questions?" I repeated.

"No," he glared up at me. "I agreed to bring you a hundred thousand *kreps*. You insisted on coming along. If you're afraid, go back and let me do it alone. But don't ask questions."

"Suppose when you get to where we're going," I suggested, "you're overruled? Suppose the other Venusians don't want to pay?"

Murdock stared past me into the distance, an affected look of boredom on his handsome features. I tried another tack.

"Obviously, you Venusians have tried to keep your existence secret," I said. "How are you going to do that after this? I'll know where your secret place is. Renaldo and his men will follow us and find it, unless we manage to trap them and tie them up until we get back."

Murdock continued to remain silent and look bored. I repressed an urge to hit him.

"All right," I said, trying to keep the anger out of my voice. "I've tried to cooperate with you. Remember that."

"I'll tell you one thing," Murdock said, rising. "Don't bother about Renaldo. Keep your men together."

"O K," I said, "O K." The perversity of human nature. That one sullenly given bit of advice made me feel grateful.

WE PLODDED on under the cathedral dome of leprous branches, their pendant leaves hanging heavy from thick short stems, pale green mottled with diseased white, and dense swarms of small insects that moved like sentient gray clouds through the labyrinth of branches.

The ground had taken a slight upgrade, but I knew it wouldn't go higher than fifty feet, because none of this terrain rose higher than that until the foothills of the distant mountains were reached.

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In fact, I wondered where a colony of Venusians could hide, this close to the settlement. Certainly not above ground. And if not above ground, where? In caves under the surface? It would have to be that. But if so, why hadn't the entrance been discovered by some prospector? Every inch of all this ground had been explored time and again. Not only that, aerial surveys had mapped it, so the least visible sign of structure would have been discovered.

I was puzzling over this when the sound of the shots came. I dropped prone. Everyone except Fred Murdock did the same. He stood with careless disdain, apparently not caring whether he got shot or not.

It became apparent at once that the shots were too far away to be meant for us. They came from ahead.

Blacky crawled over to me and lay down beside me. "Sounds like Renaldo was ahead of us and ran into an ambush," he said under his breath.

The sounds of shots were coming thick now, and drawing closer as if Renaldo and his cutthroats were running in our direction.

There were forms flitting from tree to tree now, converging ahead of us from both sides. They seemed to be horned dwarfs.

"Hold your fire until we're attacked," I shouted, loud enough so that the dwarfs could hear and know I had given the order.

Whether they heard or not I didn't know, but they seemed to be paying no attention to us watching through the trees ahead.

IT WAS obvious that they were planning to attack Renaldo from the rear in his running retreat. It was also obvious they didn't expect any attack from us, because I could have shot half a dozen from where I lay.

Their horns were not visible from their backs. Their broad shoulders were hairless and light red, like the skin of a baby. Their short arms and incredibly short, stocky legs were bare. Over each back was hung a quiver full of arrows, but none of them carried bows.

"Just as I surmised," I whispered to Blacky. "Those arrows were designed to be thrown, as well as shot from a bow, and you can see why now. Those dwarfs are too short to manage a bow effectively, and a bow short enough for them to handle wouldn't have any more zing than they could give the arrows by throwing them."

"Those short arms look like they pack plenty of muscle," Blacky observed. "Looks like we're going to find out a few things in the next few minutes."

Ahead, past the dwarfs, a figure came into view. It paused and turned back, firing at some invisible target.

With a smooth continuous movement, half a dozen short arms reached back and pulled an arrow from a quiver and threw it. Not an arrow missed its mark. The man fell where he stood.

Two others came into view and were shot down by the silent arrows before another man discovered the ambush and shouted a warning.

Bullets came in our direction now. One went past me with a vicious whine.

Then, suddenly, it was over. Four men came into view with their hands held high in the air. They were less than fifty yards away. One of them was Renaldo.

I felt disappointed at the sight of him. I felt that with him alive, there was going to be more trouble.

The dwarfs were materializing from

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Not an arrow missed its mark as the dwarfs smoothly threw them at Renaldo's invaders

all directions now. There seemed to be at least a hundred of them. Some of them had been surrounding us, and I realized with a sinking sensation that if any of my men had foolishly fired a shot, we would have been completely at the mercy of those short creatures.

And since we were obviously at their mercy anyway, there was no use in being cautious. Blacky and I realized that at the same time, and stood up.

As we walked toward where they were gathering about Renaldo and his three surviving henchmen, our own men stood up behind us and followed us.

"How about taking these handcuffs off now?" Fred Murdock asked as I passed him.

"Not until I get ready," I snapped at him, and walked on.

"Maybe that was a mistake," Blacky said in an undertone.

"And maybe not," I answered. "I want to find out why the horned dwarfs didn't shoot at us. Maybe they want Murdock to be in chains."

The dwarfs were milling around Renaldo and his three fellows, and seemed to be tying their arms behind them. There was a lot of shouting and chattering in a strange language.

Some of the dwarfs were looking at us with friendly expressions. I found myself instinctively liking them. Their large faces were frank, and carried the mark of habitual good nature.

I PUSHED through them gently until I was facing Renaldo. His three companions were pale and frightened, but he himself was defiant and snarling.

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"So you had to stick your nose into something that was none of your business."

He said nothing. His glare was eloquent enough.

All four of them were bound tightly at the wrists with thongs that seemed to be tanned vine stems of some kind, flexible and strong. The dwarfs were in the act of hobbling them with the same kind of thongs.

I took the opportunity to look closer at the trunks the dwarfs wore. They were of a thick material, dyed different colors, red, blue, and a variety of other colors. They seemed to be woven in one piece like swimming trunks, in an elastic weave that hugs the body.

Other dwarfs were joining the group now, carrying arrows bright with blood. They had evidently gone among the slain men and retrieved their arrows, which was understandable since each arrow was so carefully constructed that it must have taken hours even under ideal conditions to make them.

With the four tied securely so they couldn't escape, the dwarfs began looking at me curiously. It must have been as much of a shock to them to see a silver skull that merged under white, normal skin just above the eyebrows, as it was to any Earthman.

It began to dawn on me that they had heard of me before. Their manner gave that impression. And it encouraged me. I felt that they must be from Diana. She had perhaps had reports and knew I was coming after her, and had told them not to harm me.

"Do any of you speak English?" I asked.

They looked at one another, grinning, and said nothing. I waited for some action, and studied their horns.

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The horns were about an inch and a half long, straight up, and about three quarters of an inch thick where they met the scalp. They were in every instance the same color as their hair.

I believed these people must be the native Venusians. It was a deep relief. If they were the Venusians, then Diana wasn't one, nor was Fred Murdock.

A DWARF came running up, his short legs moving like blunt pistons. He was different than the others in that he wore a turban-like affair on his head.

He began shouting in a high pitched voice. The horned dwarfs jumped around excitedly, in high good spirits; then, as his voice became sharper, they began to fall back and form into ranks like soldiers.

When they were lined up, three deep, he strutted up and down the line like a proud sergeant. When his back was turned, they grinned at one another as if they were enjoying his strutting immensely.

I was enjoying it myself. Even he seemed to be enjoying the ludicrous figure he knew he made, and that it was a good joke among all of us.

Finally, he seemed satisfied with his show of discipline and turned to me. "You are Joe Grimm," he stated. "I am Shot Mahoy. I have orders to tell you to return to the settlement and forget all about us." He seemed to expect this to be welcome to me.

"Yes, I am Joe Grimm," I said. "But I am not returning to the settlement. I'm going on."

He looked uncomfortable now, as if this turn of events was something he hadn't counted on. "But if you do that," he protested, "we'll have to kill you."

"Are those your orders?" I asked.

"N-no," he hesitated. "But you can't come. It's not best for you. It's orders that have to be obeyed."

"Whose orders?"

"It's the orders of Zeese, our master," Shot Mahoy said. "They cannot be disobeyed."

"And what does Diana say?" I asked softly.

He squirmed uncomfortably. "She says not to harm you."

"And her orders cannot be disobeyed either," I taunted.

"Diana is safe?" Fred Murdock shouted.

I TURNED and looked at the wild expression on his face. I had never seen anything like it. It seemed the very muscles of his face would pull apart at the conflict of relief at the knowledge Diana wasn't sold to some bloated beast, anger at my deceit, rage at being deceived, and self condemnation at having been tricked by such a rank device.

"Of course she's safe," I said coolly. "What did you think I was—a heel?"

"But why that fantastic story then?" he asked.

"To get you to lead me to Diana," I said. "And I'm not turning back now. I'll find her if I have to bring excavating equipment all the way from Earth to do it—if I live."

The horned dwarfs were looking at me with a strange light in their eyes. It seemed to be pity. I felt my scalp crawl. I had given away my secret. They all knew that I, a wreck of a man—not even a man, only a tangle of nerves held together by opium—loved someone too beautiful to waste herself on me.

"So the metal monster loves the strip tease girl," Renaldo sneered.

I pulled my automatic out and shot him carefully through the forearm. It didn't quite satisfy me. I shot again, smashing his collarbone.

I held my gun half raised and

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looked around at everyone. In my mind, I was wondering how it would seem to be one of them, looking up at me, my gun raised and smoking slightly, my eyes glassy and unmoving, my lips straight and calm as they always were unless I was smiling. Renaldo was right, I was a metal monster.

Even Blacky had turned pale and stepped back a pace instinctively. Murdock looked almost sick, probably thinking he would get it next.

The spell was broken by Shot Mahoy. His high pitched voice sounded for all the world like that of a Japanese vegetable peddler naming the price on tomatoes. "You want to go on?" he said. "Very well. I will face Zeese in his displeasure. I will perhaps die, but it will be a pleasure."

The lined-up dwarfs broke ranks, dropped to their knees and bowed to him, then pivoted and bowed to me.

I stared at this spectacle in stupefaction, not knowing what to make of it. Shot Mahoy, however, seemed to be very happy about it, and said, "My men will follow me—and you."

There was a deep groan. I turned to see Renaldo falling slowly, crumpling at the knees. I rushed to him, wondering how I could have been so insane as to shoot him in cold blood.

Taking out my pocket knife, I cut his wrists thongs and slit his shirt. Blacky was giving orders to bring some first aid equipment.

The two bullets, I saw, had gone on through, leaving gaping holes at the back. It would take skin grafting, but several weeks of healing before that could be done.

I swabbed the wounds with alcohol. Renaldo had fainted. Powdering the raw tissue with the sulfa-hormone healing powder, I taped on dressings and turned the job of fastening splints over to Blacky.

My head was aching as it seldom had ached since I left the hospital. I got an opium tablet out of my metal pillbox with fingers that shook so much, they could hardly hold it.

CHAPTER IV

ONE THING opium does for a headache, it gives the illusion that the skull is lifting away, making more room for the cramped brain. Or maybe the opium just makes it possible for the mind to imagine that, so as to create the illusion of relief from pain-pressure. The pain is still there, but not quite the same. It's disembodied, impersonal. You can withdraw from it and be aware of it as something external.

Almost immediately, I began to wish I had taken it sooner. Then, I wouldn't have shot Renaldo. Sure, he was a guy that deserved it. He hadn't followed me out here just to grab a fortune and turn me loose so I could sick the Venus police on him. He would have killed me and a dozen others for ten *kreps* without hesitation.

It wasn't that I felt sorry for him. It was that I regretted having stooped to something like that—shooting a bound man while he stood helpless. It scared me a little that I was capable of doing such a thing.

We were walking again. The horned dwarfs were making Renaldo and his three men walk ahead, kicking at them with blunt legs when they slowed down.

Fred Murdock, I noted with surprise, was still handcuffed. I looked questioningly at Blacky who was walking along beside me. I had been out for a few minutes—in my opium-induced thoughts. Blacky knew this. He was well acquainted with my vagaries.

"Shot insisted Murdock be kept in chains," Blacky told me. "I don't know why, but it seems no love is lost between them."

I noticed Blacky's tones were slight-

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ly uncomfortable, and tender in a growling sort of way. I started cursing in my mind monotonously. I would rather have died a thousand deaths than have anyone suspect my love for Diana. Now, even the common lugs Blacky had taken along for this trip, the card shills and bouncers, knew about it. I had told them by my own actions.

Shot was trotting around on his short legs, his huge pink head with its yellow turban bouncing ludicrously. He enjoyed being officious. He kept his fellow dwarfs in a semi-military formation, barking at them in his high pitched voice in words I couldn't understand.

I liked Shot more and more. I felt expansive toward him. Here he was, a deformed creature, enjoying life, unafraid of death, almost boisterously enthusiastic about everything he did.

BUT WAS he deformed? If there had been only him, I would have said yes; but there were about a hundred others just like him. A race of dwarfs? I wondered.

I wondered about dwarfs back on Earth, too. Could it be that sometime in the dim, obscure past, a race of dwarfs had mixed their blood with that of the ordinary human stock, and now occasionally in the shuffle of genes the original dwarf pattern reappeared?

Assuming the horned dwarfs were the native race of Venus, could it be that thousands of years ago they had come to Earth on a visit?

The implications in the existence of these dwarfs were plenty!

And the name—Shot Mahoy. Vaguely Irish. Even his large, friendly face with its pug nose was very Irish.

Who and what was Zeese? Shot Mahoy had called him the Master, and seemed to take it for granted that Zeese had the right to kill him if he disobeyed his orders. Zeese. With a little distortion, it could become Zeus who, in old Greek legends, was God himself—an anthropomorphic Supreme Being.

Zeese. And Diana. And the horned dwarfs. And the arrows. There had been one of those arrows in Diana's things in her hotel room.

And Fred Murdock had hinted that Diana was almost three thousand years old! The memory of that came as a shock. Maybe he knew what he was talking about.

The sight of those dwarfs marching along on their blunt legs made anything seem possible! But if Diana were an immortal...three thousand years old... I felt a sinking feeling at the possibility, then realized that it didn't make any difference. She wouldn't have me even if she were only the twenty-two or three she appeared to be. No woman could feel love toward a monstrous blend of flesh and metal like me.

My thoughts turned to what might lay ahead. I began to wish that it might be dangerous, that I might die. That would solve everything quite nicely.

Bad as it was to have these people around me know that I loved Diana, it would be horrible to have her know it. If she were to find out, and look at me incredulously, and burst out laughing at the ludicrousness of it...

My scalp began to crawl. Sweat began to break out, sending sharp needles of torture into each pore.

I should turn back. I should call out to Shot Mohoy to stop. Tell him I had reconsidered, that I had decided to go back to the Gardena and spend my days taking care of things. Rescuing and rehabilitating foolish girls so they could go back to the Earth clean again, and with enough money to live on the rest of their lives without working.

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To go ahead was torture, suicide, death. And yet—I couldn't halt. I couldn't quite force my lips to say the words that would bring everything back to sanity.

I almost did. I opened my mouth to shout. It hung open while my mind battled with itself.

And then, it was too late.

THE MARCHING dwarfs and men had stopped at Shot's shrill command. He was intoning strange words. The ground at his feet was rising, parting, to reveal a shaft of light that came from the bowels of the planet itself.

I strode forward to stand beside him, Blacky at my side. Revealed was a series of stone steps that went downward and twisted until they were out of sight.

Over my head was the section of ground that had lifted. It was supported on a flat slab of stone that rested on four polished cylinders of stone, rising from beside the stone steps. A device entirely of stone! It was no wonder that wandering prospectors hadn't discovered it with their metal detecting finders.

Shot Mahoy bowed low and motioned me to descend. Without hesitation, I started down the steps, not looking back, knowing that Shot and his dwarfs would never let anyone who had seen this secret opening turn back.

I took the steps faster and faster, Blacky keeping pace with me. They spiraled completely around in a slow arc, going ever deeper into the ground.

There was a six inch drop to each step. I counted them until I had counted to a thousand, and still they continued on down.

Behind us came the noise of the others, following more slowly. Perhaps I should have waited, but I rushed on recklessly, not caring what happened to me.

The light, brighter than the much filtered sunlight of the surface, seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere. The stone steps were clean and worn, as if millions of feet had passed this way since they were first carved out.

Ahead, suddenly, the steps ended. I took the last few in reckless leaps, and stood at the bottom, my breath taken away by the gigantic splendor of the scene that confronted me.

It was a vast natural cavern whose mineral streaked, jagged roof arched impossibly high. Either we had descended far deeper than I had thought, or that roof had to be above the outside surface!

But that ceiling was only a background impression. It was the trees—green trees with small leaves and dark branches. If these trees were not transplanted from Earth, they certainly also were no relative of the sickly Leper Trees of the surface.

And birds! There were birds everywhere, cutting the air with swift wings like swallows, perching on branches, rising from the tall grasses that covered the ground, and dropping into the concealment of those grasses. The air was filled with their fluted songs, the bright colors of their darting wings.

"Well, we came," Blacky's voice sounded at my elbow, regretfully. I sensed what he meant. Life would never again be the pleasant daily routine of the Gardena. Whatever the future held, the normalcy we had carved for ourselves that had been going on undisturbed even two days before, would no longer be a part of us.

A creature very like a small deer came plunging toward us in long leaps. It paused in alarmed curiosity as it sensed our presence, stood looking at

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us, then turned and ran away in an easy, leaping gallop through the tall lush grass.

"Yes, Blacky, we came, didn't we?" I said softly.

I EXPLORED as far as I could see for the signs of habitation or roads. There was nothing man-made to be seen. Behind us, the sounds of the rest of the party became louder as they came closer. We waited, and finally they were with us, the horned dwarfs marching on past us, our men stopping around us and exclaiming in surprise and awe at the scene that confronted them.

Shot Mahoy came up to me importantly on his short legs, and grinned in delight. "This is our home," he said. "Not here, exactly, for this is one of the many game preserves and parks; but you are now in our world within a world—the real Venus."

"You are a native Venusian?" I asked.

"Ho-ho-ho," he laughed. "There are people and people, and who can say where they came from? But we have lived here so long that no one knows when we came here, or from where; so you can say we are native Venusians all right."

He left me for a moment to shout shrill orders to his troops. They began moving out into the plain. He came back.

"We must keep moving," he said. "You will find time to admire the scenery as we go along. We have many miles to go yet before we can rest."

"Where are you taking us?" I asked.

"To Zeese, Joe Grimm," he said. "I can do nothing else. But don't be afraid. There's nothing in him to fear. It is only in the friends of he who calls himself Fred Murdock that you will find cause for fear, and we may be able to avoid them."

"Tell me more, Shot Mahoy," I said. "Just who is Fred Murdock, and who are these friends of his?"

We were walking through the tall grass now, in the wake of the others where they had trampled it flat. Shot Mahoy settled into a rapid stride beside me.

"I know very little myself," he began. "And much of what I know, I'm not sure of. There are many peoples here in Venus. They may be roughly classified as the immortals, the mortals, and we dwarfs. But that classification tells you nothing much. Zeese is a giant of a man, and as old as he is big. It's rumored that he is the sire of all the human races."

THE DWARF looked up at me, trying to see into my glass lens as I looked down at him.

"You will come barely to his knee," he added quietly. "There are many stories as to how Zeese originated. One of them is that he discovered the secret of immortality. In trying it first on himself, he succeeded, but also caused himself to grow to his present proportions without intending to. He corrected this defect in the process when he made the others immortal.

"There are many immortals—just how many no one knows. They live all around the planet. Some of them will have nothing to do with Zeese any more, and he lets them be, not caring.

"There are also the mortals—offspring of the immortals, it is said, but not inheriting immortality. They are a sad race that spends its days in envying the immortals and bemoaning their fate of eventual death. Of such is the one who calls himself Fred Murdock. Often treacherous, they are also weaklings. In form and appearance, they are as the immortals. But they grow old and die."

"What about you?" I asked. "Are the dwarfs immortal?"

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"No," Shot Mahoy said. "There may be some of us somewhere that are immortal, but none that I know of. Zeese has said that we were here when he first came, thousands of years ago. Then, we were the only race of man on Venus."

"And what of Diana?" I asked, dreading the answer.

"I will let you ask her for the answer you are dreading to hear," Shot Mahoy said with a sly glance. "You see, this is her game preserve, and she should be hunting somewhere near here. Anyway, she is expecting us."

"Expecting us?" I asked vaguely. "Tell me one thing, Shot. If she is an immortal, why did she come to my casino and dance?"

"Perhaps it was because she likes to dance," Shot Mahoy said. "Or perhaps it was because she had heard of you and wanted to meet you." And with that, he galloped off on his stubby legs to shout unnecessary orders at his goodnatured fellow dwarfs.

Blacky and I looked about us as we followed the others. We were already out of sight of the stairway that led to the surface. About us were the trees, trees that might have been transplanted from Earth, though I didn't recognize what kind they were.

Far overhead, the glistening-wet roughness of the cavern dome hung like a granite cloud, and between us and it thousands of birds flew aimlessly—birds that I was almost sure were not of any species known on Earth. One especially, was a type that was larger than a robin and snow white, with a sharp beak and a call as musical as that of a meadowlark.

Suddenly, it occured to me that Shot Mahoy hadn't answered my question about whether Diana was immortal or not. He hadn't actually answered anything—or had he? He had said, "Perhaps she had heard of you and wanted to meet you."

And Fred Murdock had said that he had read all three volumes about my eye. He had heard of me, too. Was that it? Was Diana interested in me as a medical marvel? Was I to find in Diana a coolly superior immortal being who had "gone slumming" and played the part well, just so she could study one of the most spectacular products of modern surgery?

My head was throbbing again. I took another opium pill and slowly regained my attitude of aloofness from the realities that tortured my thoughts.

THE HOURS wore on. We stopped for a hasty lunch which the horned dwarfs didn't care to partake in. Shot Mahoy explained that they ate only one meal a day, and that a very heavy one before their sleep period. So ingrained was this custom, that if they were to eat anything they wouldn't be able to keep awake.

I estimated that we had gone fifteen miles, when at last the stony ceiling of the cavern dropped to meet the plain ahead of us.

The dwarfs were carrying Renaldo, spelling each other off every half mile or so. He was weak, but I knew from past experience that there would be no infection in his wounds. The healing powders developed to their current state of all-purpose perfection insured that.

The dwarfs ahead suddenly stopped and looked upward. My eye followed their gaze. Overhead, there was a battle going on.

One of the white birds was being pursued by a larger bird that looked like a hawk. The smaller bird was darting this way and that in a frantic effort to dodge the sharply out-thrust claws of the pursuer, whose greater wingspread and power brought those

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claws closer to their target with each swoop.

As I watched, a silver streak rose from the ground at a spot on the other side of some trees. That swift streak reached and touched the larger bird, and materialized as an arrow, piercing the bird's body.

A hoarse cry escaped its throat. Its wings thrashed frenziedly for brief seconds, then it was plummeting downward in directionless struggle with the arrow. It landed almost at my feet.

I walked over to it, marvelling at the uncanny marksmanship that could strike a bird high in the air in its unpredictable flight. As I bent down to pick it up, a cry from the throats of the dwarfs made me look up.

A TALL FIGURE had emerged from the cluster of trees, holding a longbow. It was Diana! There was no mistaking her beauty. Hanging at her waist was a quiver of arrows. On her red lips was a smile. She was wearing one of the gowns she had brought with her when she first came to the Gardena.

I noticed these things while I tried to turn and run, my legs frozen with a paralysis of terror at the prospect of her seeing me.

But she had already seen me, and as she came toward us, her eyes were on me. I stood there, waiting, unable to move, the dead hawk in my hand.

I had never seen her look at me the way she was looking now. Her eyes held lights I had never hoped to see in any woman's eyes again. Impossible as I knew it to be, she was not seeing the thing of flesh and metal that was my outward appearance. Or if she was, it had ceased to be abhorrent to her. She stopped less than three feet away from me. Her lips trembled a little.

"Hello, Joe," she said, her voice sweeter than words can describe. Her hand reached out and touched my cheek as I tired to answer.

I could feel a hot flush burning my face. I wanted to turn and run, and keep running forever.

"You don't need to say anything, Joe," Diana said. "Shot Mahoy sent a messenger ahead, and I know everything—even how you tricked Fred Murdock into guiding you here."

"You—you're not mad at me for coming?" I stammered. And as I read the answer in her eyes, I suddenly wished I had eyes with which to tell her what was in my soul—the love, the terrible torture, the hopelessness, the despair.

Then, without realizing I had done so, I did a mad, a terrible thing, for which there could be no forgiveness. I dropped the dead hawk and stepped forward, throwing my arms around her. My lips found hers and crushed them. I felt her warm body against mine. I felt her quick breath against my cheek.

Then, about to release her and step back and wait for the look of contempt and disgust that I knew must come, my senses suddenly reeled. It was utterly impossible, unthinkable—but her lips were returning my kiss with a passion equal to my own!

I felt hot tears gush from the glass filled pockets of my eyes and bathe my cheeks, making them slippery against hers. She was making soft, crying sounds, her arms around me, holding me close.

Finally, I leaned back and withdrew my arms, taking her face between my two hands and holding it so I could look in her eyes.

"Diana," I said. "How can this be? All this time that I've tortured myself with thoughts of what would happen if you ever found out—and you love me! How can you?"

"How can I?" The thought seemed

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new to her. She laughed delightedly at the thought. "How little you know about women."

I put my arms around her again and drew her close.

"I've thought that myself," she said, her voice muffled in my neck. "I've thought, how can he love me if he learns I am centuries old—a legendary figure on Earth—at the dawn of history as man knows it. You see, Joe, in that sense I'm a cripple, too."

"Then it's true?" I heard my voice say, weak and thin.

It was her turn to draw back. "Does it make...a difference?" she asked.

"Not to me," I said. "But to you? You will see me grow old and die in a few short years." As I spoke those words, a horrible question rose in my mind. How many countless others had she loved and been loved by as they grew old and dropped along her path?

The question was banished by her answer. "No," she said, "that won't happen. One of two things will happen. Either you will be forbidden to me and we will have to deny our love forever—or you will be made immortal as I am. That is for Zeese to decide."

"Zeese again," I muttered.

I looked around us. We were alone. The others were gone. I saw them almost a mile away, moving toward the wall of the cavern. Obviously, they had departed to leave us in the privacy of our first finding of each other.

Diana picked up the dead hawk and withdrew her arrow, wiping it clean on the grass, and putting it in her quiver with the others.

Then, she placed her hand in mine and we started walking toward the retreating figures of the dwarfs and the others. For the first time in a long time, my head was not aching. Whatever might come, Diana loved me. Grotesque though I might be in the sight of others, in her sight I was desirable. That, more treasured than anything else, could never be taken from me.

CHAPTER V

THERE FOLLOWED days such as I had never dared dream of. Days of companionship with Diana, during which we roamed the fields of her private hunting grounds and she taught me how to use the bow. Because there were a few bones missing in my shoulder assembly, I wasn't able to use the same type bow she herself used. But from some mysterious source, one came that was designed just for me. Anyway, the arrows seemed to need very little force behind them to fly unbelievable distances.

Sometimes, we hunted. Sometimes, we sought the privacy of some clump of trees and lay side by side, telling each other our innermost thoughts.

During this period of bliss, however, I sensed a worry in Diana that she tired to hide from me. Zeese. He was quite a bogey man to her. I had to pass that hurdle before she could marry me.

Fred Murdock, I learned, had been sent somewhere to get the rouell out of his system. I gathered in a vague way that he was some sort of hanger-on at the court of the immortals, and had fallen in love with Diana, as had many other young men. I didn't blame them.

He had followed Diana when she came to the Gardena to work for me, and had drunk himself sillly when she refused to have anything to do with him. I felt guilty when I thought of the way I had tricked him into bringing me here to this underground world.

Blacky and his boys were growing

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restless. Once, Blacky went hunting with Diana and me, but after that he refused to. I knew that was because he felt that he made a crowd.

I began to wonder what to do about him and the boys. Renaldo, I learned, had managed somehow to escape into some dark reach of this underground, and no one seemed at all concerned about finding him and his three men.

"Where they're going, we don't need to worry about them coming back," Diana had said, and changed the subject before I could ask her for more details.

A week passed. Then, Diana brought up the subject of Blacky. "Do you think we could rely on him and the others to keep quiet about all this?" she asked gravely.

From that, I knew she had talked to someone, and that they were wondering what to do with Blacky, too.

A day later, Diana and I accompanied Blacky and the boys and Shot Mahoy and his jovial warriors across the plains, to the long climb upward back to the surface. There, we said goodbye, and I promised Blacky I would be back someday soon. If I didn't show up, he was to have the whole casino and carry it on as we had before.

Diana ordered Shot Mahoy to show Blacky how to come back if he wanted to for any reason. So we all said goodbye, and Diana and I stood close together, watching them climb until they were out of sight around the first bend in the stairs.

I felt very subdued on our way back across the plain. Blacky had been my other self for so long, I felt lost without him.

Diana was silent, sensing my mood. Also, she had other things on her mind. It wasn't until later in the day that she spoke of them. "Now, it's time to face realities, Joe."

"Such as what?" I asked. "Zeese?"

"Yes," Diana said, and I could see she was worried about it.

WELL, I was worried, too, and the closer we got to Zeese, the more worried I became. Our trip was made in Diana's private car, which was a superstreamlined thing of plastic with no wheels to support it, that sped along an almost optically perfect tunnel highway. It floated half an inch off the road, apparently held up by the compressed air that drove it.

Our journey took us through several gigantic caverns similar to Diana's own private hunting grounds. Some of them were filled with buildings of almost dreamlike architecture. In these cavern cities, I caught brief glimpses of other cars similar to the one in which we rode. There were many people, also, and most of them were the horned dwarfs.

Finally, the highway merged into a broader one on which there were many cars ahead of us and behind us. This was in a tunnel. When the tunnel ended, the broad highway swept out over the floor of a cavern far larger than any of the others. The ceiling of this cavern was at least a mile overhead.

There were cultivated fields, large parks, and for several miles, a river flowed along beside the highway. In the distance could be seen the tall towers of buildings. We were coming to a city as large as any on Earth.

"How far below the surface of Venus are we here?" I asked Diana.

"About twenty miles," she answered matter-of-factly. "The slope of the highway has been constant. We've come over two hundred miles. This is Zeese's cavern city we're coming to."

"And to think that we've been scraping the surface up on top for half a century without suspecting what was below us!" I marveled.

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We were entering the city now. It was in many ways like any supermodern city, if you pretended the cars were maybe year after next's models. All the buildings had a new look to them, as if they had just been built. This was due to the absence of smoke and other dirt that begrime the buildings of Earth cities.

There were sidewalks on which thousands of the dwarfs were going their ways, streets filled with the ethereal appearing cars like the one in which I rode with Diana.

Some of the buildings were at least twenty stories high. Ahead, I occasionally glimpsed a building taller than all the rest. It was toward this building that we headed. Finally, Diana drove her car up a ramp onto a broad portal leading to its interior.

There, we got out and turned the car over to a dwarf attendant. We stepped onto an escalator that carried us upward. Altogether, we then climbed ten stories, each at least fifty feet high. The escalators themselves were twelve feet wide, with enormous steps six feet deep and three feet high.

I felt diminutive in spite of the many dwarfs around us, half as tall as I.

"Just how big is Zeese?" I asked.

"Almost thirty feet tall," Diana answered. "Part of his heighth is due to the first immortality serum he perfected, but he originally came from a race of Earthmen that were giants."

"Earthmen?" I said. "Did you come from the Earth yourself, Diana?"

"Yes," she said. "I'm from the race you know of as Titans. Sometime, I'll tell you the story of how Zeese discovered the secret of immortality and chose a few of us for his companions; how we discovered science and developed it to the point where we were able to leave Earth and come here to Venus.

"Since Earthmen have been coming to Venus, we have slipped among them and paid visits to Earth to study the history of events since we left. We know that many of your legends of gods are distorted tales of the days when we were still there, trying to lift man out of barbarism. Eventually, we were forced to conclude man wasn't ready yet, and so we left and settled here among the horned dwarfs. But we can't talk anymore just now. We're coming to the floor where Zeese holds audience."

WE WERE the only ones on the escalator as it slowly rose into the vast audience chamber, big as a cavern itself. Its ceiling, fifty feet overhead, was a sky blue laced with marble laticeworks of supporting beams.

Then, I could see nothing but the giant figure reclining in a huge stone seat at the far end of the room. I remembered the time I had first seen a full grown gorilla when I was eight years old. For a moment, I had felt the impression that I was looking through a magnifying glass at an ordinary monkey. I had the same sensation now, a feeling that I must have slipped an enlarging lens in my eye case.

Zeese was of normal proportions, well formed. His thirty feet of stature was hard to accept with the mind. There was a smile on his bearded face as I looked at him. And as I looked, a deep voice, thunderous in quality, speaking very slowly, ordered me to come forward.

I felt like an ant crawling on a sidewalk as I went across the vast floor toward him, and each of his feet were as thick as the body of a full grown man. He could have reached out with one foot and crushed me like an insect.

There was a bright twinkle in his huge eyes. Those eyes were a soft

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brown, as was his hair. "So this is Joe Grimm, the man who, out of all the countless ones she could have taken in her long life, Diana has chosen as mate." The thunderous deep voice chuckled.

It was the most awesome phenomenon I had ever witnessed—that giant bearded head so far above me, even though Zeese was reclining in a half slouching sitting posture in his mountain of a chair. There was a keen intelligence to it, a fluidity of personality to the half concealed red lips nested in the beard. There was an unmistakeable humanness.

But there was also something unhuman. Something...cosmic. Words couldn't possibly describe it. It was fearsome. It was like watching the inexorable passage of planets on their courses from the emptiness of space, and knowing that no human power could possibly alter their paths.

I WAS afraid. Behind that massive forehead lay a brain larger and heavier than my entire body—and older than written history. My future, my very life, hung suspended there, subject to the whim of that giant being.

Mercy? Pity? Could these have any effect on the workings of that ancient mind? Or were his decisions dictated by standards I couldn't comprehend? Yes, I was more afraid than I had ever been before in my life. So I stood there, a pygmy barely coming to his knee, and I tried as best I could to keep from trembling.

Even when he took a large magnifying glass several feet in diameter and leaned forward, holding it before him and looking at me through it, I stood silent, barely controlling my trembling. I wanted desperately to take an opium tablet, but didn't have the courage nor the will to move.

"Very sloppy," Zeese's thunderous voice mumbled absently. It was like listening to a very slow public speaker—or more accurately, listening to the record of a voice run at half speed. "But also done with more skill than I believed possible in mortals. You are obviously able to see clearly through that lens, since you appreciate Diana's beauty."

His breathing was like the sigh of wind through the trees as he studied my forehead lense. He straightened up and laid the huge magnifying glass aside. "The only question now," he said heavily, "is whether you have the courage?" It came as a direct question.

"The courage for what?" I dared to ask.

Instead of answering, he reached out and wrapped a hand around me. His thumb and fingers completely circled my body as he lifted me and held me in front of him. With a smooth, dizzying swoop, he moved me to his right shoulder and sat me down.

My feet were lost in his beard. Sitting, my head came just high enough to see over his. I grasped at his ear for support.

Diana was looking up at me with a grave smile. I smiled back nervously, feeling like a kitten being played with by a grown man.

"Turn the beam on us, Diana," Zeese said. Then, to me, as Diana turned and crossed the huge chamber and vanished through a small door set in a large one: "This beam is a weapon to which I'm vulnerable. I wish to see what its effects are on you, Joe Grimm. So when I feel its full effect, I want to hear from you what you feel."

Diana returned immediately with a tube that looked very similar to a large flashlight. From the doorway, she pointed it at us. A pale beam shot out.

At first, I felt nothing. Then, slow-

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ly, my skin began to tingle queerly. Under me, I could feel the massive shoulder on which I rested jerking slightly. Then, I felt electric forces tugging at my own muscles.

"What do you feel, and see?" the deep voice asked, as though suffering terrible agonies.

"My skin tingles," I said. "My muscles are a little jerky from some force like an electric current."

"What—do—you—see?" Zeese asked boomingly.

"Why, nothing," I said.

"Nothing?" he echoed, his thunderous tones carrying a note of despair.

"Nothing different. Unless it's the flashlight thing Diana has turned on us," I said. "Everything looks the same as it was."

THERE WAS a sigh of escaping breath. The light winked out. Diana came running toward us.

"He can see!" she shouted.

"And he called it nothing," Zeese said. "Joe Grimm, you are the only living being that can see when that weapon is turned on him!"

"You mean it blinded you?" I asked, as he sat me down on the floor.

"Yes," Zeese said. "And it will paralyze the sight of every eye, except yours. Now, perhaps the stalemate that has existed since before the dawn of your history can be broken. If it can, if you can fetch me the ring that is held by my enemy, Votan, without which I have not dared move from this cavern for thousands of years, you shall be given immortality and have Diana by your side throughout eternity."

"But Zeese," Diana exclaimed. "Even though he is immune to the blinding light, he is almost certain to meet death if he succeeds in getting the ring. He couldn't escape with it."

"Nevertheless, he must steal the ring back from Votan," Zeese said. "Unless he does, he will be denied immortality, and you must forget him."

"In that case," I said. "I'll get the ring or die in the attempt. Life will not be worth living if I can't have Diana."

"Well spoken, lad," Zeese said. "And I give you my word that you shall come through alive—if I have to go after you myself. But now, I'd better tell you what the ring is, and what you'll be up against in braving Votan's lair.

"There is a jewel made of a substance stranger than any material known to man. It's not of matter as man knows matter, but of elements finer than the electrons themselves. Long ago, the substance of this jewel was gathered from space over thousands of light years in extent. So rare is this substance, that it was possible to gather only enough for one small jewel, which was set into a ring for me to wear on my finger. And this jewel has the ability to gather the forces of subspace itself and focus them. The wearer of that ring can control forces that form and destroy suns and planets.

"Votan learned of this ring and devised a plan to steal it. He created the blinding ray, and because there was no defense against it, was able to take the ring from me.

"I had been wiser than he thought, however, for in shaping the ring, I had my craftsmen build it so that it could not be used by anyone whose finger was not as large as my own, and there is no other creature alive as large as myself. Further, the ring was devised so that if it were damaged or altered, it would immediately explode the jewel and send its component substance back into the subether from where it was gathered.

"Without the ring, I am helpless. I must lurk here in the protection of my fortress cavern. Votan himself is

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of the race of giants from which I sprang. He was the first after me to become immortal by injection of the serum I devised. But before I made him immortal, I discovered what had caused me to grow, and eliminated that from it, so he remained his normal ten feet in height.

"Come. I'll show you the way to the ring. I'll show you the ring itself. Watch closely, and you will be able to remember every step of the way."

ZEESE ROSE to his feet, towering above me. He crossed the vast auditorium to the giant door and opened it. I followed, Diana beside me.

We were in a smaller room now, filled with giant machines that were like strange electronic devices. He turned one on. From its interior, beams shot out to focus against a smooth wall of the room.

"You had best start from Diana's hunting preserve," Zeese said. "Here, at one side of her cavern, is an entrance to a tunnel that leads down to Votan's domain. It is this way that the one you call Renaldo escaped."

On the screen, I saw Diana's cavern with its birds and deer-like creatures. The scene rushed toward a large face of stone that moved aside as we watched.

Then, the tunnel rushed past on the screen as if we were riding in a swift car of some sort. It came to another blank wall. Zeese manipulated the electronic machine. On the screen appeared a part of the wall. There was a stone protruding from it.

"Push on this stone, and it will open the portal to Votan's lair," Zeese said. "Then, smash the stone so that the portal cannot close."

The scene rushed on and on down the curving tunnel, until at last it came out in a cavern as vast as that of Zeese's. It sped by back ways and almost obscure paths until it came to another tunnel. It followed this only a short way when it came to a side passage that opened up into a large chamber.

There was a large block of polished marble. On its glistening surface lay the ring. On the screen, the jewel glowed with an almost blinding brilliance. The ring band was large enough to fit around Diana's wrist.

"I tuned the spyray to avoid contact with the living," Zeese said. "On your journey, you will be met by many dangers. You should be able to meet them all by taking the blinding ray tube with you, because you're immune to it. And the element of surprise will be on your side until you have reached the ring. After that, you must watch your step."

ON THE WAY back to Diana's cavern, I began to recover from the numbing shock of Zeese's presence and the superscience I had witnessed and seen evidence of. Unbelievable as it was, it was no more unbelievable than man's own science, in many ways.

A century or two ago, it would have seemed fantastic to learn of a substance like Plutonium, not found in nature; man-made; so powerful that a few pounds of it could destroy a city. A jewel of a substance finer than electrons, that gathered cosmic energies and directed them through the wearer, was fantastic only because it belonged to a science unknown to man.

And, surely, if man could develop from the dark ages to flight to the stars in three short centuries, these immortals could build science beyond man's wildest dreams in the thousands of years they had had to develop.

Diana, sitting at my side, driving the car, held secrets that would have

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caused scientists to revise their whole field of knowledge.

Even that spyscreen, as Zeese had called it—was that a simple moving picture projector, or something that could actually bring views of things far distant, through miles of rock? And the simple flashlight laying on the seat beside me in the car—Zeese had claimed that its rays blinded him. They hadn't blinded me, but I had felt a strange tingling of my skin and twitching of my muscles as if a current of electricity had been generated in me. Was it possible that the science of Votan had found a way to focus a magnetic field, and send it out as a beam, so that it could set up induced currents over a distance in the same way as one coil of a transformer sets up a current in another?

I knew little of science. All I could do was accept what I saw. Try to meet whatever danger I was to encounter, and try to come out alive—for Diana.

CHAPTER VI

I TRUDGED along the tunnel, wishing I could rest. I had come miles since leaving Diana at the entrance to the path to Votan.

Swinging from my left hand was a heavy, shorthandled maul. It was to use in smashing the stone key that opened and closed the portal to the lower caverns.

In my right hand was the blinding ray tube. Resting against my ribs was something warm, asleep. It was a bird. When Diana had taken me to the opening, she had whistled melodiously, calling, and one of the birds circling above us had alighted on her shoulder. She had tucked its head under its wing and soothed it to sleep.

"Keep it safe," she had said. "If you need me, waken it and turn it loose, and it will fly to me. I'd go with you, but Zeese forbids it. Remember, Joe, if you don't live, I would rather be dead than continue to live alone after having found you."

The bird's warmth against my ribs was a tie that bound me to Diana. It was tangible evidence of her love.

The light of the upper caverns was fading slowly. Whatever elements there was in that atmosphere that gave rise to it, it was growing more feeble here, as if lack of circulation kept it away from this tunnel.

I had been walking for at least three hours, and was beginning to wonder how much farther I would have to go before reaching the barrier where I could use the heavy maul and discard it.

Then, suddenly, it was directly ahead of me. Actually, there was no sign of it. If I had not known it would be there, I would have thought it just a dead end to the tunnel. But my eye now found the stone that would open the portal. I pressed in on it. Silently, a whole section of the wall dropped downward until its top surface became part of the floor.

I brought the heavy maul carefully against the stone and, after several tries, felt it shatter. I was grateful then for the weight of the heavy maul. Without that extra weight, I would never have been able to break that stone with my lack of leverage due to a missing collar bone.

THERE WAS a hoarse whisper of sound behind me that caused me to whirl in alarm. My finger was on the stud that would shoot out the blinding beam of energy from the tube in my hand when recognition of the four figures against the wall halted me. It was Renaldo and his three stooges.

"Is that you, Joe?" Renaldo whis-

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pered in a hoarse voice.

"Yes," I said.

He crawled toward me, moaning. "Save us, Joe," he cried weakly. "We've been down here all this time without food or water. We're dying."

While he talked, he crawled toward me. Suddenly, his hand reached out and seized my foot, jerking it from under me. As I fell, the three against the wall leaped forward.

Instinctively, I kicked out. I felt my foot connect with something solid. Then, I was pinned down. Renaldo, with a rapidly swelling eye, stood over me, his face full of hate. He had my gun in his hand.

"I ought to kill you now," he snarled. "But I'll wait until you lead us out of here." Then, to his men, "Let him up. If he tries anything, I can shoot him."

They stepped back. I got up painfully. My head was aching.

"If you want to get out of here," I said. "The only way I know of is back the way we came."

"Yeah?" Renaldo sneered. "Then how come you knew exactly how to open this wall?"

"Have it your own way," I said.

"Search him," Renaldo said to his men. "But don't get in line with this gun."

I stood still while they searched me.

"What's this?" one of them exclaimed. He jerked open my shirt and brought out the sleeping bird. "A dead bird," he said disgustedly, and threw it aside.

In midair, the bird shot its head out from under its wing and took flight. Renaldo shot at it once, nervously, and missed. But that gave me a chance. I ducked down and picked up the blinding ray tube, flashing it on even as I picked it up. At the same time, I scooted back so I could bathe all of them with its rays.

Renaldo, blinded, turned this way and that, and quickly discovered that with his back to the ray tube, he could see. "This way!" he shouted. His three companions turned in the direction of the sound. They ran until they were about fifty feet away. There, they stopped and tried to turn back to face me. They discovered that meant becoming blinded again. They gave it up and ran until they were out of sight on the road to Votan's kingdom.

I shut off the ray. It was a wonderful defense weapon. I could understand why there had been a stalemate between Zeese and Votan for so long.

Diana's bird was gone. My gun was gone. I hesitated. Should I turn around and go back? I couldn't hope to accomplish anything without the gun, even though I had the blinding ray.

IF I TURNED back, though, the element of surprise would be gone. Renaldo and his three men would continue on until they were killed or captured, believing they were on a path that would lead them out of the cavern world. Votan's men would come and discover the portal open and the key to it smashed, and would wait here.

My only hope of reaching my goal without a fight against overwhelming numbers of Votan's hordes was to follow after Renaldo as swiftly as possible. It might even be that they could serve me a favor by being decoys for me—if I kept them in sight.

Without hesitating any longer, I started after them. In a short time, I saw them going ahead cautiously but with a distance-eating stride.

Hour after hour we continued. Once, I thought I heard the beat of wings behind me and turned; but I could see no sign of Diana's bird.

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At last the tunnel ended. I waited until Renaldo and his men had left it, then crept up to the opening to the large cavern I had seen through the spyscreen.

The cavern was exactly as I had seen it. I quickly found the first path I was to take on my journey across it. I noted, too, that the cavern was teeming with people. There was a large city that covered most of its floor.

Renaldo had gone off to one side in a direction away from that in which I was to go. I slipped from the security of the tunnel and ran swiftly to the concealment of a clump of trees. When I reached them, I saw the next landmark I was to reach. As I ran to it, I heard the sound of a shot behind me, some distance away. Renaldo had been discovered.

I stopp'd and looked back. A quarter of a mile away, I saw Renaldo and his three men being attacked by dozens of Votan's men who used bows and arrows. As I watched, I saw Renaldo fall, and in quick succession his three companions also fell. That was the end for them, and as I turned my back on them and continued my way, I felt perhaps it was for me, too. It would be discovered now that the portal was open. I couldn't come back this way, and there was no other way back that I knew of.

With Diana's bird gone, there would be no way to take Zeese's ring to him if I succeeded in stealing it. Yet, I kept on, because there was no alternative.

Then, out of the air, there was a flutter of white wings. Diana's bird reappeared, and settled on my shoulder. It had followed me rather than return to Diana. It seemed almost that it understood its mission and responsibilities. I returned it to the safety of my shirt. Shortly after, I lay down in the concealment of some bushes and slept.

I AWOKE refreshed but thirsty. The bushes bore a purple berry which was quite sweet and juicy. I fed the bird some berries, too, then let it fly, feeling that after having returned to me once, it would do so again. And I was right. As I made my way around the perimeter of the cavern, keeping to the concealment of trees as much as possible, it made a few low flights, but for the most part rode on my shoulder.

When at last I saw the opening of the tunnel ahead, I tucked its head under its wing and returned it to my bosom. Then, I crept forward, ray tube held ready.

The tunnel was much larger than any other I had seen. It was big enough to allow Zeese himself to walk upright. It was deserted.

Before entering it, I turned to look back over the valley of the cavern. At least a mile away, I saw a man walking toward me.

Suddenly, I realized it was no ordinary man. At that distance, he should appear small. Instead, he appeared quite large—as though he were less than a city block away.

It was Votan, coming directly toward the tunnel, and it wouldn't take him long to reach it! There was no time to waste.

I ran along the tunnel until I came to the side passage. I knew every step of the way as if I had been here hundreds of times.

Without hesitation, I entered the large chamber and ran across to the pedestal on which rested the gleaming jewel. It was much smaller than I had remembered it. The ring band of white platinum was wire thin.

Inspiration hit me. I reached out and took the ring. Pulling open my shirt I took out the bird and draped the ring over its head. Then I tossed

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it into the air and waved for it to go.

It swooped down and hovered before me for an instant, as if bidding me goodbye. Then, it was gone. And unless it were discovered and shot down, it would make it back to Diana's hunting preserve. The portal was open. There was nothing to stop it.

NOW, I SEARCHED for a place of concealment. Votan would be here shortly, and there was no way to escape. The giant room was devoid of places to hide. I had wasted precious moments.

I heard slow, heavy footsteps. A man ten feet high appeared in the tunnel opening to the room. Votan was bearded, and looked enough like Zeese to be his brother.

His eyes went to the pedestal and saw that the ring was missing. There was a snarl on his face as his eyes came to rest on me.

I pointed the blinding ray at him and darted to one side. He rushed toward the spot where I had stood, his feet threshing in an attempt to crush me. Keeping the ray turned on him, I backed toward the exit, while Votan stamped about the room. At the last instant, he realized what was happening and dashed blindly toward me, but I was running down the passage toward the main tunnel, holding the ray tube on my shoulder, pointed in back of me.

I reached the main tunnel and paused. To go back the way I had come would be suicide. The tunnel in the opposite direction led upward at a slow grade. The fact that Votan would expect me to try to go back the way I had come, decided me. I ran deeper into the tunnel until it curved slightly, so that I couldn't be seen.

Then, suddenly, I was bathed in tingling light. Along the ceiling of the tunnel, spots of light showed where the blinding rays were originating. I realized now why it was impossible for anyone but me to come here.

But why would there be blinding rays in this direction? This led away from the path I had come. Could it be that in this direction led another route to Zeese's kingdom?

Ahead of me lay a deep pit in the floor. If I had been blind, I would have stumbled into it. There was a narrow ledge along the wall of the tunnel that led by it.

When I reached the other side, I felt safe. Votan wouldn't be able to follow as long as the blinding rays were on.

How many hours I ran on, sometimes falling and laying still, sometimes barely able to stagger along, I don't know. At last, I came to a blank wall that brought my senseless flight to an end.

I lay down against it and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. And, only a moment later, it seemed, I awakened with the feeling that the wall was moving.

I rolled away from it and stood up. It was dropping slowly down!

MOMENTS later, it had sunk into the floor. Zeese stood there, his thirty feet towering above me. On his finger, I saw the ring I had placed about the neck of Diana's bird.

The jewel in that ring was now glowing with fires of fury. It seemed that flames laced out from it hungrily, and drew back reluctantly.

"Joe Grimm?" Zeese's heavy voice sounded questioningly.

"I'm here," I shouted.

"Come into my hand," Zeese said, stooping down and laying his hand on the floor.

I did as he said, realizing he couldn't see me. He was blinded.

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When he felt me touch his hand, he gently wrapped his fingers around me and lifted me onto his shoulder.

"The deadlock is broken," he sounded exultant. "You will serve as my eyes to lead me to Votan. Can you do that?"

"Yes," I shouted.

"Then let's go," he said. "I'll feel my way along and you can warn me of traps and tell me what to do to get around them."

It was like riding the back of a super-elephant to sit on his shoulder and hang onto his ear and heavy mat of coarse hair. After a while, I caught onto his gait and rode much easier.

Time after time, I directed his feet so that he missed falling into the deep pits in our path. And, at last, we were back at the side passage leading to Votan's lair.

"I could destroy his lair," Zeese whispered. "But I must be sure he's in it first."

He stole forward, his enormous feet silent as he set them down with infinite care.

"We're almost there," I whispered. "Another step and you'll be at the entrance."

"Hang on," Zeese whispered.

He took a giant stride that carried him into the chamber. His hand came up, and from the ring came a titanic blast that bathed the entire chamber with cosmic, destroying force. It lashed out—and then crept back into the ring.

"Was he there?" Zeese asked.

"No," I said.

"Then he's outside," Zeese muttered. He turned around and retraced his steps to the main tunnel, and turned toward the valley outlet.

Shortly, we were there. As far as the eye could reach were warriors lined up, long bows ready to loose an avalanche of arrows.

"Back," I whispered quickly.

Zeese stepped back. We had not been seen. Quickly, I told Zeese what I had seen.

"I'll destroy them," he said. "Tell me when we're out of the tunnel."

He charged forward, and when he stepped from the tunnel into the open, I shouted for him to use his ring.

INSTANTLY, flame lashed out over the valley before us. The archers had unloosed their first salvo of arrows. Most of these were consumed in midair. One brushed by me too close for comfort. Several had lodged in Zeese's giant frame. He seemed not to notice them.

The cosmic fire drew back into the ring. On all sides lay charred bodies and smouldering vegetation.

Then I saw Votan. He was striding toward us over the bodies of his warriors, contemptuous of the danger of the ring. I told Zeese. The ring lashed out, engulfing Votan with its consuming fire. When it drew back, he was still advancing. His clothes had been stripped from him. His massive beard and mane had been burned short. Yet on he came.

I told Zeese. Again, the cosmic flame lashed out from the ring. Again and again, until the ground Votan walked on was seething lava.

I saw a possibility there, and told Zeese. He directed the force of the ring at Votan's feet. Slowly, they sank into the molten rock. While sulphurous fumes rose up around him, he sank lower and lower, unable to escape.

Not until his lashing arms had disappeared from sight did I let Zeese stop. And when the cosmic flames drew back within the ring at last, we stood there until the molten rock cooled over and hardened.

"He should be dead by now," I said.

"No," Zeese said. "He can never die, but also he can never get free."

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THE DOOR to my office opened. Diana came in and hooked a shapely limb over the edge of my desk. I looked at her through the solitary eye in my forehead. Her eyes looked down at me lazily.

I smiled up at her and straightened up. "What's up?" I asked, trying to keep my voice calm.

She shrugged. "Just a little trouble at the bar. Blacky is taking care of it."

"Send Blacky in, will you?" I asked her.

She nodded, gave me a smile and turned to leave.

I was glad she couldn't see into my eye and know that I loved her. It would never do for her to learn that. I couldn't stand the look of revulsion that I was sure would appear on her face.

I stood up and stretched, wishing she hadn't come in and broken into my dreams. The opium was wearing off now.

Opium is a terrible, wonderful drug. It takes you in its toils and makes all your dreams come true. Mine had almost come true. In another moment, I would have been made an immortal, and Diana and I would have gone off to some distant star on an ecstatic honeymoon.

I sighed. Venus is a dreary planet. There is nothing here but Leper Trees, the remains of some departed civilization—and derelicts, men who come here in search of their dreams. They don't have sense enough to leave when they can, and later they don't have the will to leave.

SHE HAD started for the door as my thoughts followed her. And then, with the door already opened, she turned back to me. There was a strange look on her face—a look that I had never seen there before.

"Joe," she said hesitantly.

"Yes, Diana?"

"Joe...I don't know how to say this..."

"Say what, Diana?"

Somehow, I knew what she was going to say. It was in her eyes. And what I saw there left me frozen in my chair. For something was happening that was impossible. It could not be....

"Joe, we ought to get married. I know you'll never say it—now that we're back here on the surface world. But Zeese promised happiness to us..."

Her voice trailed off for a moment and left me speechless. I could only stare at her, my mind refusing to believe what I heard, but my heart crying out to her.

Then, her voice picked up again and she smiled wanly. "Unless, of course, you never really wanted it that way, Joe."

Unless I never wanted it that way! I got up from my chair, conscious of the fact that I had knocked it over in my haste. And then I was around the desk, reaching for her. And she was waiting.

I knew that this wasn't an opium dream—even though everything pointed to that being the case. How could I have awakened in my office with the realization that it was only a dream?

I thought of Zeese as my arms closed around Diana and I felt the soft warmness of her against me. To a god, anything and everything is possible. Even this. And he had promised us happiness...

Even if it was a dream, I never wanted to wake up again....

THE END

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DEVIL'S DUST

By Charles Recour

EXPLOSION, fire, radiation, and blast are only four of the Atomic Age's gifts to men. And these unwelcome gifts are being suitably prepared for. The Korean war has heightened the omnipresent atomic-bomb fear in the world and suitable measures are being taken to meet it. Lately there has been a spate of publicity trying to inform and prepare the public for this threat.

Less well known than the atomic bomb, but even more fearsome—if that is possible—is the "devil's dust" as a number of scientists have dubbed radioactive dust. This material, merely radioactive elements incorporated in ordinary sand, is truly an ominous threat. It also appears to be an even more effective weapon than the Bomb. The reason is this: where the "devil's dust" falls, humans just ain't!

Heightening the terror of this material is the fact that it so happens that the only warning given at all to a populace by this radio-active material, is that offered by the clicking and the flashing of a Geiger counter. Beyond this nothing. Since apparently nothing happens it may be difficult to convince people that they are in mortal dread of being destroyed just as surely as if they'd been blasted from the air.

To point out that this is not theory or inference, recently scientists at the Illinois Institute of Technology were informed by an Army authority that the bomb blast made so long ago at Alamogordo, was just beginning to demonstrate its subtler effects now. Animals which had been exposed to the dusty air scattered by the bomb, were beginning to develop an incipient form of cancer!

Imagine then what a future attack of this sort could do and could be like if the extremely powerful dusts now known were used? The thought is staggering. And unquestionably a future war would see the utilization of this controlled radio-activity, for unlike bombs, it doesn't destroy with fire and flame the objective it's aimed at. It merely makes it utterly uninhabitable for a given length of time dependent upon the attacker's whim.

Plans of course are afoot to fight this menace. The methods are simple. Time—of course—is the greatest ally. But if you can't put people in radio-active factories for a year or two you're bound to lose. Therefore you must rid the contaminated areas of the dust. To do so means specially equipped teams of scrubbers, who must hose down and sweep away the contaminant, working all the while under the impossible conditions of lead and rubber shielding.

The plan of the devil's dust is not nice to contemplate. Yet it is here and must be reckoned with. It is a dubious pleasure to realize that the same radio-active products used to such great advantage in medicine can come back in the form of infinitely terrible weapons...

NUMBERS GAME

By John Weston

THE USES of mathematics are so varied, cover so many fields, and enter so intimately into every aspect of our daily living, that sometimes it's difficult to wax lyrical over the true beauty of the subject. But there have been many aesthetic appreciations of the mathematical art.

As a rule people are easily fased by the mention of trigonometry or algebra. These branches of mathematics seem so straightforward and clear that they offer no difficulty. But just suggest the calculus and watch the reaction! "That stuff! That's too rough! I wouldn't understand it!"

Actually the calculus is easier to understand in many respects than the complicated convolutions of the "numbers game" which many people play every day without thinking about it. The odds on horse racing stems from statistics and chance, incomparably more complicated branches of mathematics than the "simple ol' calc".

Contrary to popular opinion also is the fact that almost everything that can be done with the aid of this tool, can also be done without it. That is, calculus is not necessary for most physical problems. But—and this is an awfully big "but"—most explanations of physics and the other sciences become a lot easier to understand than without it.

If you ever have occasion to delve into the nature of electricity beyond the stages of the simplest form of popularization, you'll get a chance to see what is meant. For example, in the study of say something like the "electric field" or "lines of force", you'll discover if you have some knowledge of the calculus that your understanding of the whole phenomenon is heightened a thousand fold.

A color blind man can see often very sharply and clearly. But the real aspects of nature never touch his eye. You can explain color to a color-blind man until you're blue in the face, and while he'll get an idea of what you're driving at, he'll still see everything in terms of black and white. Similarly, those with some mathematical training have an advantage in understanding the events and happenings in the mechanical and electrical world around them. It is as if they see their new knowledge in color in contrast to the former grays and blacks and whites.

Consequently, if you know anyone who plans a career in science and who yet has a tendency to avoid the study of mathematics, warn him, fight with him, beat him over the head—but insist that he cultivate a taste for mathematics. Without it he'll never get into his subject matter. The days of the Edisons and the Faradays are gone—they could get by without a mathematical background—not so today—and the future will be even more demanding.

Get into the "numbers racket"—get into it all the way—but make sure that it involves more than the ten integers!

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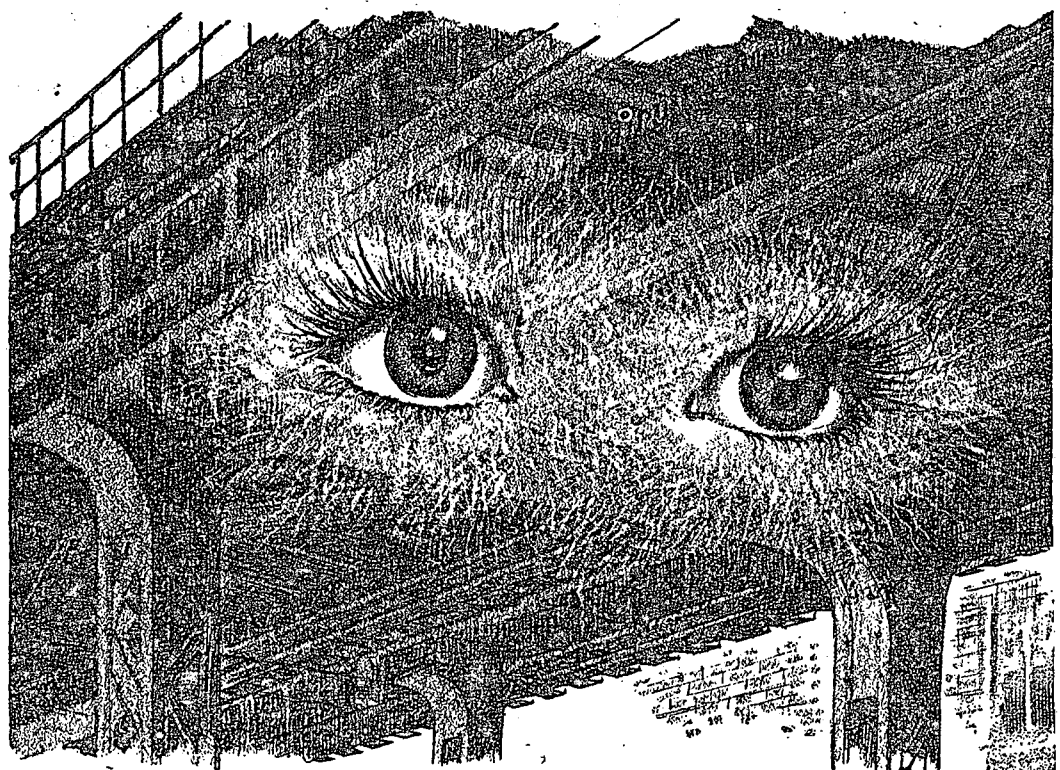

DEATH HAS GREEN EYES

By John W. Jakes

Because red is usually the danger signal, Henry Brundage walked straight into trouble when the green lights began to beckon . . .

BEHIND him, Mrs. Pietro was shrieking. Behind him too, in the dingy apartment, lay his wife; his nagging, irritable and now very dead wife. Henry Brundage ran wildly down the twilight-washed street. His gray hair flapped, and the gun was still in his left hand.

People turned to peer at him, and then stopped to stare. The gun joggled as he ran on, his mind whirled and burned by the thought of his crime, and the more horrible thought that he must run, for he had been discovered!

For years he had struggled with his fear of the forces of justice; a fear that had kept his wife alive. Long months ago he had bought a gun.

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Gasping for breath, he ran toward the safety of the elevated structure

Several times he had almost worked himself into a violent rage, in which he would have killed her. But her voice always stopped him. She would look at him and seem to see what he planned, and her great green eyes would bulge wide with mirth as she laughed. "You'll never do it, Henry. Because you know they'll catch you. They always catch killers. You know if you ever killed me there would be no way out. You

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would be caught. Every road in the world leads back to one point. The police." And then she had laughed hilariously, jeering at his fright.

But now it was done. She had been weak with a cold and a fever. She hadn't been able to talk to him, except in frantic whispers. He had overcome the fear of the law and shot her to death. Only Mrs. Pietro, the landlady, had come running into the room, and seen him with the gun in his hand.

So he was running, without thought of anything but escape. Escape that led back to the police, who even now might be answering a call from Mrs. Pietro to the station house a few blocks away.

His breath drove sharp jabs of pain through his body. Stumbling, he leaned on an iron railing. He raised his eyes and saw the gloomy frame of an el station towering against the sky.

Elevated train, he thought. Train. Move. Escape. *Escape!*

He took a step toward the first stair and clawed at the rail. The world around him tilted and fell away. Darkness seeped in about the edges of his vision, like ink on a blotter. He felt himself pulled down.

Brundage struggled to rise, fighting back the dark. His breathing, which he had not been able to hear for a moment, sounded again. He pulled himself upright. His body felt remote, as if it were slipping away in another direction, and his consciousness was the only thing to be preserved.

Sobbing with loud jagged gasps, he raced up the shadowy stairs. He could hear Mrs. Pietro down the block, jabbering to the neighbors. And there were other voices. Mumbling, curious voices. Voices that would bring the law.

As he staggered to the landing, he was vaguely aware that he should remember something about the el station. He almost felt that he shouldn't be there, but the notion vanished in the stress of the moment.

For here was sanctuary; moving wheels that would roll far from his apartment; and beyond, buses or trains into the great dark night of the whole wide world. They would never find him.

HE RUSHED past the ticket window, not even glancing to see if the cashier was there. A single car waited on the platform, yellow light spilling from it. Hastily he pocketed the gun.

The conductor on the train platform was an indistinct blur. Brundage couldn't make out even the semblance of a face or figure. But the lights of the train were comforting. He gasped and hurried inside, huddling down on a cream wicker seat. With a ghostly sigh, the wheels began to turn.

After a few moments of calm relief, Brundage examined his situation. The car was empty, and the conductor was a dark blob on the platform, motionless. A clackety-clackety echoed within Brundage's thoughts. *Killed her dead*, it repeated, *killed her dead.* The tone was one of extreme pleasure.

He wiped one veined hand across his forehead and brushed back a lock of gray hair dangling before his eyes. The fear was slowly vanishing. What an easy thing after all. The police would never trace him. And his disgusting wife would no longer mock him because he was a rather pathetic failure as a human being. Her immense green eyes were closed. Forever.

He noticed that the train was curving around a bend. That wasn't correct. Not correct at all. He knew, as most citizens of the city knew, the direction in which the elevated ran. That direction was straight.

Rising, with the secure weight of the gun pressing his side, he moved

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to the platform. The conductor remained formless darkness.

"Pardon me," Brundage said with a false calm, "where does this train stop?"

"We make one stop," was the answer, and Brundage realized that he should recognize the voice.

"What is the stop?"

"We make one stop," came the reply again, hollow and dismal.

Brundage felt a small shiver go dancing up his back with pattering feet. He also felt an urgent need to reassure himself of the security of the train.

"I wish you wouldn't stand out there," he said.

"Very well," answered the shapeless conductor. He walked forward into the car, and yellow light dripped down and washed away the black like vanishing dirt.

"Where is the one stop?" Brundage began.

He gagged and grasped for his gun, fumbling, *fumbling*....

For the conductor was not a conductor at all. He...or *it*...was a grotesque caricature of his wife, and from its face two monstrous green eyes bulged and burned.

"This train," wheezed the thing, "goes only one way, like all the other trains and all the other roads. To the police."

Brundage cried out brokenly. The gun was caught in the lining of his jacket. The green eyes were over him, pressing down.

As his gun came free, the yellow lights of the train vanished entirely. The old fear of being trapped fountained up in him, pouring through every nerve and fiber. With tremendous effort he tried to squeeze the trigger, but he could not. The eyes were two green suns, closer and closer. Over them he heard a mocking whine of speech, and it was his *wife's* voice. "The fear, Henry. The fear that always leads back...to the police..."

He saw the green eyes and they were all around him. They reached inside his skull and scorched his brain.

And then, for all time, there was nothing.

"IS THAT the whole story?" the sergeant said tiredly, fiddling with his pencil, weary of the long session of sobs and moans.

Mrs. Pietro leaned against the high desk, nodding and crying more loudly than ever.

"Shoquist," said the sergeant to another policeman standing by the woman, "when you got to the apartment, what did you find?"

Shoquist waved one hand aimlessly. "Found the woman, dead. The husband had gone."

"Did anybody on the street see him go?"

"Yeah. They said he ran about a block, and stopped a minute at the old el station. Then he started on again, down the street, just like he wasn't thinking. Bumping into things. Falling. By the time I took up the trail, he was gone completely."

"Well he sure as hell wouldn't have gone into the el station," the sergeant snorted. "There haven't been any trains running for eight months at least."

"I know that," Shoquist replied, "but I checked anyway. He wasn't there. And there's no way he could have gotten down beside the one stairway."

"Maybe he..." the sergeant was saying. There was a loud shouting. Another officer gestured wildly. Shoquist and the sergeant strode rapidly to where the policeman stood pointing at the sidewalk beyond the window glass.

"He came walking down the street," the man mumbled, "like he couldn't think, and something was dragging him to this place. He walked right up

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in front of the door, and looked at it, and all of a sudden, it was like . . . like his mind was *pulled back* from somewhere . . .” His face quivered as he breathed, “Christ, it was terrible.”

Shoquist and the sergeant were already outside, kneeling beside the figure. “This is him all right,” Shoquist asserted. “I saw a picture of him.”

Henry Brundage lay on his back, arms and legs spread wide apart. The gun was still clutched in one hand. He was dead, but his mouth gaped and his face was twisted in a frightening expression.

In spite of death, his eyes were wide open, staring sightlessly in unearthly horror. They seemed to be watching the two light globes on either side of the station door.

The globes were like two great eyes of green brilliance, flaring in the night.

THE END

VENGEANCE

By E. Bruce Yaches

HE LAY ON his belly and was sick. The nausea gripped and his pain-wracked body quivered convulsively. With a supreme effort of will he calmed himself and momentarily conquered the omnipresent impulse to disgorge. Radiationsickness was like that.

Far to the east he could see clearly the smoke hovering in a pall over the stricken city. The bombs had fired everything. And now this village twenty miles away was completely deserted. It looked untouched but there was no sound. Even the dogs and cats had fled. The answer was clear. The flasher on the Geiger counter was winking rapidly.

Dust clouds had carried this far, he knew. And he knew he was going to die. The lethal radiations were already converting his body into a miniature atomic furnace. How he'd made it this far he didn't know.

He rose wearily fighting pain and nausea. He picked up his bag of grenades and the sub-machine gun and started to move toward the street.

Suddenly he flung himself to the Earth almost fainting as the revulsion of an outraged system hit him again. He fought it bitterly and again suppressed the retching. With his ear pressed against the ground and his body buried in the deep grass of the lot he listened. There was the unmistakable rumble of something heavy—treads of some kind. Must be a farmer with a tractor he thought. Nevertheless he remained hidden and waited.

The rumbling increased. That was no tractor. Around the corner it appeared abruptly. He watched it with leaden, hopeless eyes as it ground forward. Then suddenly hope kindled in his eyes. It was stopping. With a cough its engine ceased grinding and the ponderous machine came to a halt.

He recognized it. They'd had enough warning. It was similar to the conventional tanks, the large one-hundred tonners, but it was even more massive, coated with the radiation-resistants. From the ponderous turret protruded the long lean barrel of a huge one millimeter gun, from the sides lesser weapons jutted.

The top was studded with an array of slim rods and whips which he knew to be radio and radar antennae. Painted on the side were numbers and the omnipresent bright red star. Hatred welled up inside him like bile and he felt an impulse to run toward the stationary thing and kick its sides in.

The radiation tank remained still for a few minutes. No one emerged. Evidently they were surveying the ground. They didn't really appreciate how grievously they'd hit the country. By now their transports must be landing practically unhindered, here in the East, at least.

Finally the cover of the turret swung up and the helmeted head of a soldier appeared.

He could have knocked that head off at this range of less than twenty yards but he refrained, knowing the futility of knocking out one man.

Gradually, assuring themselves it was safe, other members of the crew came out, laughing and chattering in the Slavic accents, unaware they were being watched. Obviously they were cooling off. They stood in a small group of eight and he was tempted to cut them down at once but he didn't know whether or not any more were in the radiation tank.

A spasm of retching again wracked his body. He'd have to act fast. He couldn't wait much longer. Soon he'd be too weak to lift his weapon.

He debated for a moment whether to use the grenades or the gun. He decided to try both.

And just as he decided the eight broke up, some starting toward the houses, the

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others squatting down in the street near the sides of the tank.

Half rising, he flung three grenades toward those near the tank as fast as he could throw them. At the same time he brought up the vicious snout of his sub-machine gun and sprayed the soldiers walking toward the house. The Sovs crumpled into a heap where the grenades blew up with a tremendous ear-crashing roar.

Sweeping his sub-machine gun back and forth like a hose, until the magazine was empty, he cut down the remaining Sovs. Then he saw he'd been a little too soon. But his misjudgment didn't matter.

The minor turret was swinging rapidly in his direction, even as he rose to meet it, slapping a fresh magazine into place. But it was useless. Something in front of him chattered, a strange line going from the tank's gun to him. Suddenly he felt lightheaded, and then he was on his belly again with strange lights before his eyes. But he felt happy. There were lots more of him—more like him who didn't worry about living—who would be glad to take Sovs with them...

IMITATION OF LIFE

By Merritt Linn

EVER SINCE science came into its own in the Western World, and demonstrated its marvelous success with manipulating Man's physical environment, practicioners have attempted to extend its methods to sociology—with a notable lack of success. In sociology, economics, business, and men's relation with men, there seems to have been no way to get a scientific foot-hold. How can you apply mathematics and experimental methods to a study of life?

In order to do so, you must have a starting place. In the physical sciences for example, a scientist generally begins with a model of the situation in which he's interested. Then by experiments and theories with this model, by extension he is able to grapple with the real case. But where is there a model of human relations, or a model of an economic situation?

Ten or fifteen years ago certain scientists began to realize that there is such a model, Oskar Morgenstern, and John von Neumann, the former a brilliant economist and the latter one of the world's great mathematicians, began to understand that right before our eyes there is a perfect miniature model of the conflicting, complicated problems of competitive living. And it is simple enough to permit analysis.

It is—of all things—the game of *poker!* In fact all games from chess through bridge, gin rummy, and what-have-you, where gambling, yet control, exist, have some of the same qualities, but none compares with actual living, like poker!

In the famous treatise, "Theory of Games and Economic Behavior", these two scientists, introduced a model of the fierce battle that is life, in the form of the game of poker and by analogy and analysis showed that this would serve as an excellent starting point for making a scientific attack on the nature of men's relationship with men.

Momentarily this sounds as if the elephant has labored and brought forth a mouse. But like all beginnings, it is deceptive. To conclude, John MacDonald beautifully summarizes the point of what we are trying to say when he mentions in his book, "Strategy in Poker, Business and War", this: "Consider the poker game. Each man is privy alone to the secret of his own hand; he knows the rest only as money talks. No one could be more surprised or shocked than the players themselves to discover that in this ritual of poker might lie a clue to problems that have puzzled economists for a long time. Yet what scientists since Aristotle have tried and failed to do has all the time been done by the gamecocks of mankind, and that is to design a controlled experiment of human action, a kind of laboratory of man's experience. Like the laws of gravity and all great thought, it is quite simple and has always been in plain view. The laboratory is the *game*, and the laboratory of capitalism, and of socialism too for that matter, is poker."

Ponder those sentences from the quotation above. Briefly that summarizes well, this "miniature laboratory of human experience" about which we've been talking. In the very next sentence, MacDonald says, "...the real substance of poker is not cards, but money." Cards are merely convenient tools for relating the men to one another. What they want is each other's money. The way in which they go about getting it by bluffing and betting by talking, by drawing cards, etc., is a perfect simulation of what we do actually in real life, in living, in earning a living, and in dealing with other people.

The success of this new approach to sociological problems is startling and has already produced great results in military strategic planning, in business planning and so on. But where its greatest potentialities lie is in the future development of the application of scientific thinking to the social problems that beset men and with which men have dealt so poorly in the past.

Able to revolutionize a world, able to travel across a planet in hours, on the verge of attaining the heavenly bodies, capable of splitting the atom, still Man is unable to control himself. How important is anything which can give him some clue to this knowledge? The answer is that it's so important it should take precedence over everything else in his experience!

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LET'S DO IT AGAIN!

THE SUN WAS warm; the breeze ruffling the filmo curtains of the breakfast nook was warm. George Curtis, third class citizen, looked at the sun and relished the breeze.

He looked at his wife and smiled. She smiled back.

"I don't think I'll go to work today," George said.

Her smile left; her lovely face was suddenly blank. "Production is the

What year, out of all time, would you choose to start life over again?

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By William Campbell Gault

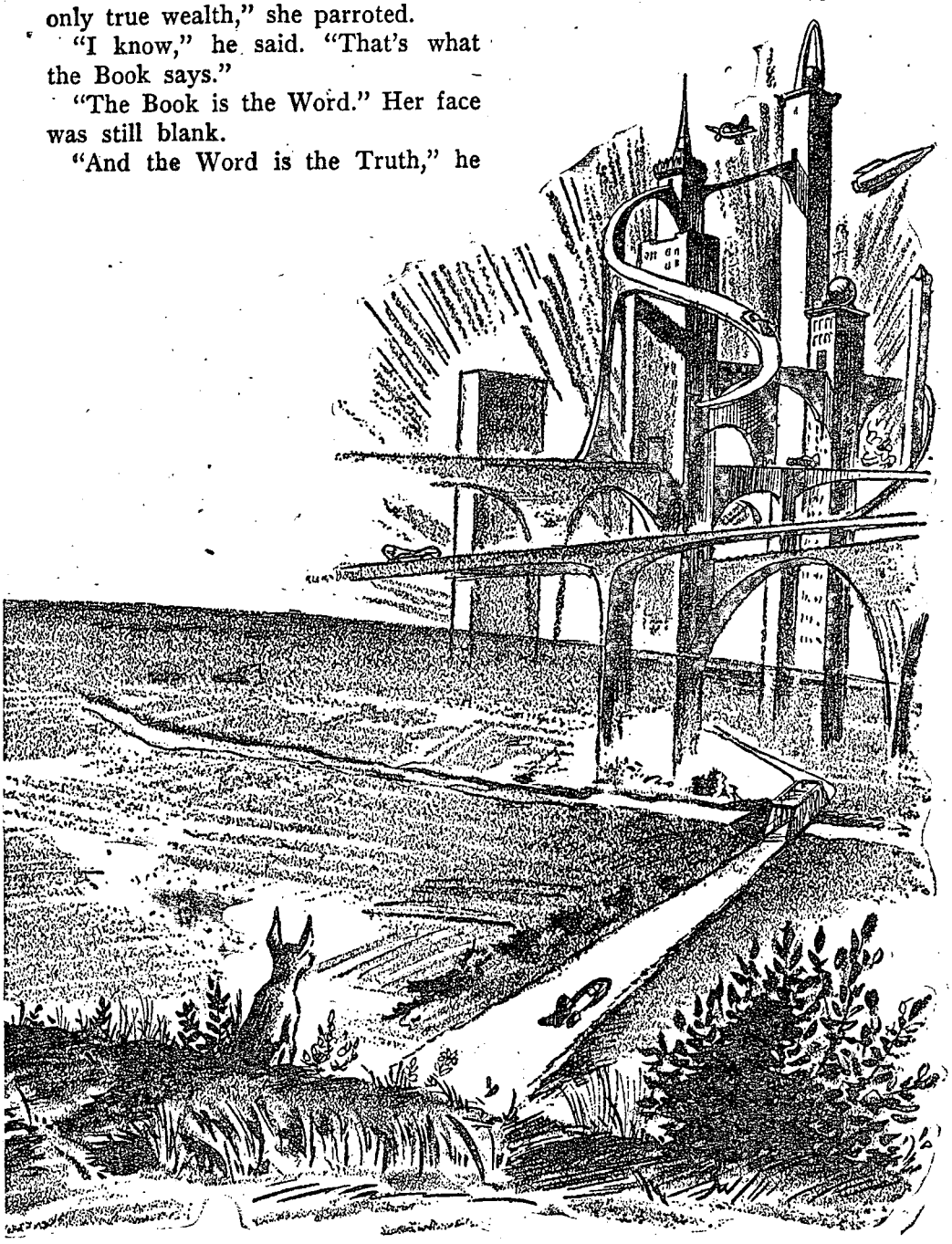
Most women are masters of double-talk. And can there be a better way to win a weaponless war?

only true wealth," she parroted.

"I know," he said. "That's what the Book says."

"The Book is the Word." Her face was still blank.

"And the Word is the Truth," he



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added impatiently, "and by the Truth shall we live. I know all that. To hell with it, if there is a hell. It's a nice day, and I'm going to play golf. Give me the Word on that."

"Competition is strife," she parroted. "The true end of competition is murder. Universal competition is war."

He chuckled. "You missed on that one. The word is not 'universal' but 'mass'. The quotation from the Book is: 'Mass competition is war'. Page 1789, paragraph 2." One of the things that saved George Curtis from being a fourth class citizen was his prodigious memory.

"George," she said, "do you love me?"

"Look it up in the Book," he said.

"George, this isn't like you."

"I'm sorry, honey. I'm just an ornery cuss, and maybe some day I'll outgrow it. Yes, I love you. I love you dearly. I love you more than the Book or the Word or even Truth. But love is an opiate, foe to logic. You'll find that on page 1206, near the bottom of the page. Jean, honey, why shouldn't I play golf if I want to? What is my contribution to this enlightened society, my class three contribution? I'm going to play golf."

She sighed. She found, somewhere, a smile. "Maybe rain's on the schedule for today. Have you been following the weather charts?"

"I'll play Bryn Meadows," he said. "The pro's got a drag with the weather director. He only gets rain at night."

Above their plastic table, the audo-news, as though psychic, said, "Warm, dry, southerly breeze, six miles an hour, locally. In the Great Plains section, one and one quarter inches to fall from 10:12 A.M. today to 4:58 P.M., with no rain from noon to one o'clock. Workers having lunch hours other than this hour stay indoors."

George snapped the switch near the window, and the audo-news stopped, its light dimming.

His wife said, "More coffee?"

"Please."

He watched her as she walked to the warming table. Beautiful figure, fine carriage, delightful disposition. But gullible.

As she poured his coffee, he said, "You must love me, too. I'm not... what you were brought up to admire."

"I love you," she said quietly.

"More than the Word or the Book or Truth?"

"I love you. Isn't that enough?"

"It's more than I deserve. But I don't know if it's enough or not. Tell me about yourself, baby."

"We've been married three years, George. You know me."

"No, I don't. What's going on under that beautiful front? What do you really think, feel, want, believe?"

NOW, HER gaze was level. Now, her face was not bland. "Why do you ask? Are you looking for new converts to the Cause?"

The silence was absolute. His eyes searched hers, and fell before their candor. His eyes were on the cherry-colored plastic of the table top as he said, "I should have realized you'd discover about—about us, sooner or later. You're not stupid, Jean."

"Stupid enough. I—learned what I'd been taught, and believed it. I'd—like to believe in the Cause."

"Why?" he said hoarsely. "What can it get you? What can you gain? Why should you—"

She arrested his flow of words with a quiet gesture. "Why and what, you ask. There's only one 'why' to all of it, and I voiced it before. I love you."

"Oh, honey," he said. "Oh—Truth."

She said nothing.

"It's a lonely road," he continued. "It's no place for a woman. It's dan-

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gerous, and probably futile. And, more important than that, how do we know we aren't in error? It's no place to follow me, darling, because of—of that opiate the Book calls love."

"I could quote you the Bible on that," she said smilingly. "How is it—'whither thou goest, I shall go. Your people shall be my people, your—"

"You'd better not let your father hear you quoting the Bible," George told her. "Or even misquoting it."

Her father was a class one citizen. Her father was a scientist.

"Don't judge him too quickly, George." She stacked the dishes in front of her, and rose. "You asked me what I thought, felt, wanted, believed. When I tried to tell you, you rejected me."

"For your own good. Honey, I—"

She put his dishes on top of her own. "Why don't you go out and play golf, class three citizen? I'll phone the office and tell them you're sick. Why don't you go out and play golf—with Danny?"

"You don't miss much, do you?" he said. "Yes, it's Danny I'm going to play with. And at least a part of the reason is because we like to play golf."

"I won't ask you the bigger part of the reason," Jean said, "being on... the outside. Have a good game."

"I'll try," he said, and looked at her back. "I'll...talk to you when I get home, Jean."

"Thanks," she said. "That's big of you."

"Jean—please...I..."

NOW, SHE turned, and she was smiling. She took two steps, and her lips were warm on his. Her arms, around his neck, were tight and trembling. She was close and desirable. George was a little giddy as she stepped back.

She said, "Go and plot your dreams, Lover. I can wait."

A remarkable girl. Behind that beautiful front, a woman. George said, "It's a lonely road, dearest, but I'll be back to tell you about it."

He went out to his car, still bemused. It was a five cylinder, L-head Tertiary, and adequate. George would have preferred a double-overhead cam Primary, but they were not for third class citizens, even if, through some alchemy, the third class citizen should garner the necessary credits.

In the Bryn Meadows parking lot, he parked it next to a Primary convertible, and wondered who owned it.

When he went in through the bar, he saw who it was. Nels Hovde, the local recreational director. Nels looked at him as though he was some new species of worm, then went back to talking to Joe Devlin, the club's president.

In the 2032 wave of competition-bans that had swept the country, golf, because it was a non-contact game, had survived. Football, which was miniature war, had been the first to go, followed by hockey, polo, basketball, ad infinitum.

The presence of Nels Hovde made George wonder about golf's current status.

In the locker room, Danny was waiting. He had one spiked shoe on, one off. He had a bottle in his hand. "Made it myself," he said. "Here's to crime."

"Take it easy, Danny," George said sharply. Danny was inclined to spout his rebellion openly at times.

"Try it," Danny said. "It's odorless."

George looked at the bottle and back at Danny. Then, he took it and tilted it to his lips. Not bad, not bad at all. He looked at Danny inquiringly.

"Hair tonic, brake juice and lucidate," Danny said. "But one's

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enough." He took the bottle back and stowed it behind some clean towels in his locker. "See who's upstairs?"

"I saw. Wonder what the new wrinkle is."

Danny was smiling. "I wonder."

George looked at him sharply. "You know, don't you?"

"Me? I don't know from nuthin'."

"Well, we'll learn in a couple days. How many strokes you want?"

"None."

GEORGE SAID patiently, "You didn't hear me right. I asked you how many strokes you wanted."

"And I said none. Just give me the ties."

"I thought there was an angle."

"No angle. If I tie, I win. And I should. You're better, aren't you?"

"All right," George said. "I know better than to argue with a first tee lawyer like you. You get the ties."

Danny chuckled. He said, "You'll find some new balls in your bag. Quadi-credit a hole all right?"

"That's all right. What do you mean, new balls? You been messing with my golf bag, junior?"

Danny shook his head. "Joe Devlin sent Jack around with new balls for all the members. Probably a rubber shortage, or they want to try out a new plastic, or something."

"Cut it out. What kind of story is that you're—"

Danny said, "George, this is 2037. Have you forgotten? This is the age of absurdity. This is—"

"Danny, for Truth's sake, lower your voice. Jack's probably got both ears wide open. Damn it, man, you've got to learn to—"

"I'm sorry," Danny said quietly. "Oh, George, I know, I'm sorry. I'm too—impatient, I guess."

"Impatience can stop us, throw our timing off, kill all that we've worked toward. Think of that when you get a fit of juvenile impatience."

"Sure, sure, sure. I said I was sorry, George. Let's get out on the tee."

The sun was still warm, the breeze still soft. They stood on the first tee, and Danny said quietly, "If they really expect people to stop believing in God, they'd better tear up all the golf courses."

"It's a beautiful club, Bryn Meadows," George said. "I wonder how long it'll be before they make a grade one subdivision out of it."

"Over my dead body," Danny said.

"Probably," George agreed. He took one of the new balls from his bag and examined it curiously. He teed it high, and swung his driver experimentally.

"I get the ties," Danny said. "Lay the wood to it, slugger."

George laid the wood to it. The click was clean, the ball went out in a slowly rising drive. It was a well hit ball and showed fine action. It bounced twice, and rolled. It stopped about two hundred and fifteen yards out.

"There's nothing wrong with that ball," George said. "They'll convert me yet. That's a sweet ball, Danny."

DANNY WAS no slugger, despite his stocky figure. He hit a clean ball, but short of George's by some twenty-five yards. It faded slightly and died on the right edge of the fairway.

George was standing next to his ball by the time Danny was ready to hit his. He was a great guy for practice swings.

The green was still a good two hundred yards away, but Danny had an iron in his hand. Which didn't make sense.

Danny went back, came into it.

And just as Danny hit his ball,

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there was a click in the ball at George's feet. It was a distinct, metallic click, and George looked at it nervously.

Danny's ball went up and up, like a pitch shot.

George called, "What the heck did you use?"

"A nine iron."

"Two hundred yards from the green—a nine iron? Are you nuts?"

"Not me. Are you going to hit yours, or talk it to the green?"

"I'm going to hit mine, and with a brassie."

Which he did. Nice lie, and a nice shot. The ball bounced in front of the green, slowed, and trickled on.

One putt for the bird, or two for the par.

Danny came up to his, swung wildly, and knocked it twelve yards in the general direction of the green.

"Topped it," Danny explained.

His next shot was a little better, about fourteen yards. "Topped it again," he said.

The next try went twenty yards, all of it along the ground.

"Danny," George said, "I think you topped it." He started to laugh.

"Don't be so smug," Danny said. "Two will get you twelve, you don't beat me on this hole."

George said, "What's the gag? I know you, lad, and it's time to level with me. What's the gag?"

Danny didn't answer. Danny put his heart and his fine wrists into a five iron that found the green and died.

They walked silently to the green.

Danny was long, about eighteen feet from the cup. He didn't fuss with it; it rolled true all the way, and dropped.

Again, George heard the click in his own ball.

He said, "Let's see, you had a drive, a nine iron, three dubs, a five iron and one putt. That's...seven. I can four-putt, and beat you."

"But you won't four-putt," Danny said.

George bent over his ball.

"You'll five-putt," Danny said.

George looked up, annoyed. "A little silence maybe?"

"Which will give me the hole," Danny said. "I get the ties."

GEORGE STUDIED it anew, stroked it cleanly. It was a sweetheart. It rolled true all the way. All the way to the cup, that is. Then, it circled the cup and died some four inches past.

"I'll be Truth-damned," George said.

He went over to pick it up. "I guess that's a gimme."

"Putt it," Danny said.

George replaced the ball and stroked it. It walked to the edge of the cup, and returned to its former position.

"Oh—Truth, no..." George. "Not golf, too?"

Again, George tried, and again. He was lying six, at this stage.

Danny said, "Now, try to miss."

George looked at him, and at the ball. George put his putter blade in front of the ball and stroked it—away from the hole.

The ball went one inch away from the hole, and five inches in reverse, to drop with a rattle.

George looked at the hole, and at Danny. He didn't bend to retrieve the ball.

Danny said, "Very simple. The balls, all the balls in a foursome, are tuned to the high ball. There's an electronic core which determines whether the cup shall be repellent or magnetic. Nobody can get less than the high score on each hole."

George said mildly, "I guess that's that."

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Danny smiled. "The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, you know. We can't have any more Waterloos. And as that old general said, 'On the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds which on other fields in—' "

"I know, I know," George said. "Danny, shut up. The acme of absurdity in the enlightened age has been reached. We don't need an oral obituary."

"I can see their homes now," Danny said. "On that knoll overlooking the sixteenth fairway, the sterile, functional, chrome and glass mansion of Nels Hovde. There's no need for a golf course unless there are golfers. Shall we go back and finish the joy juice?"

"I guess." George picked up his bag, then paused. He went over to deposit it in the trap. "There's no use in carrying that back. Can't be used for anything but golf, anyway."

Danny put his bag next to it, looked down at both of them and said humbly, "Rest in peace. Maybe I'll be back for you."

THEY WALKED down the fairway together, toward the clubhouse. George said, "First they took away our caddies, then our caddy carts. Then, they stopped watering the fairways. How silly can they get?"

"I hope I don't live long enough to find out," Danny said.

They went up onto the porch, and Nels Hovde was sitting there with Joe Devlin.

Hovde was smiling. "Enjoy the game, gentlemen?"

George said, "We only managed to get in one hole," and went by.

Danny paused in front of the director. Danny said, "New subdivison, sir?"

George turned fearfully. Danny was unpredictable.

Hovde's ice blue eyes looked Danny over thoughtfully. "I'm not sure I understand."

"There'll be no golf played. It's desirable property."

"Why won't there be any golf played? Because the competitive element has been eliminated?"

"Roughly. I'd call it the—the skill element, sir."

"Typical third class thinking," Hovde said coolly. "You are a third class citizen, aren't you?"

Danny nodded.

"I can always tell," Hovde said. "You've read the Book on the subject of competition, I assume, citizen?"

"Yes, sir."

Now, the voice was as cold as the blue eyes. "You believe the Book, citizen? You accept it as Truth?"

George held his breath, his eyes glued to Danny.

Danny paused, then said, "The Word and the Book are as true as Truth, sir."

"Then, there's nothing further to discuss, I believe. You have used up eighty-three seconds of my time at one credit a second. It will be added to your club bill."

Again, Danny paused. Then he said quietly, "Yes, sir."

George started breathing again. Together, he and Danny walked down into the locker room.

"I should have slugged him," Danny said.

"And spend the rest of your life reading Joyce? Danny, it's an ill wind, and so forth."

Danny was bending down to dig out the bottle. He offered it to George. "Make sense."

"New allies." George took a stiff jolt and handed the bottle back. "Along with the football fans and jazz fans, and movie addicts. Golfers,

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now. A fanatical, unified gang golfers are, Danny."

"But not political," Danny pointed out. "They're too happy to be interested in politics."

"Are? Or were too happy?"

DANNY STARED at him. Danny said, "You know, you might have a thought there, a thought beyond your citizenship."

"Might? Sound out Joe Devlin. Joe's been playing golf since he was nine. Tactful now though, Danny."

"Oh, yes," Danny said. "Don't you think Joe would make a good Cell leader? We could call it the Tee Totalers, give it a socially acceptable front, you know. They don't understand humor anyway, those first class jerks. George, I'm at work already."

"But slowly and carefully, remember. This has been a big day for the Cause. Let's make it a memorable one."

Danny winked at him. "Today's truth is tomorrow's fallacy."

"Today's research is tomorrow's witchcraft," George answered.

Danny raised his hand, palm forward. "Long live yesterday."

"Amen," George said.

When he got home, Jean was mowing the lawn. She was wearing shorts and a halter. She stopped as he turned into the drive. She was at the car door when he got out. "Something's happened," she said. Under her tan, she was pale. "Why are you home? George, it's—you've been found out."

He shook his head. "They've—there'll be no more golf."

"No more golf." She put a hand on his arm. "Because it's competitive?"

"Probably. Or because it's fun. Or because it interferes with production, or isn't logical, or doesn't improve the mind. What does it matter? No more golf."

"I wish I could sympathize with you," she said, "but I always felt it was a silly game, chasing a ball over the hills."

"I won't argue with you there. It is a silly game. That's why people like it. It's as unpredictable and competitive, and occasionally as rewarding, as people. Did you phone the office?"

She nodded. "Talked to Mr. Kelner. I...got the impression he didn't believe me, George."

"He wouldn't. He doesn't believe anything unless he reads it in the Book. Well, he can't fire me, though he can shift me to even less enjoyable work."

"It would have to be within your vocational aptitude."

"Yes, dear. Page 2684, near the middle, under the Aptitude Code. Don't worry, I'm well aware of all my rights. It wouldn't take much memory to remember those. Honey, whose side are you on?"

"Yours. Whatever side it is, yours."

"Well, that wouldn't be your father's. I think you understand that, by now."

She closed her eyes. "How many are there of you?"

"How many?" He smiled. "Who knows? We're not that well organized. How many people didn't like to work? How many liked movies and crooners and escape literature and whiskey and football, and even soap operas? How many ordinary people were there? And how many are there, still?"

"Millions, I suppose," she said. "You could call me one. When did democracy die, George? When did it honestly die?"

"You don't know that? You never studied that?"

SHE SHOOK her head. "Mother was very advanced. Mother used

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to tell me yesterday was for morons."

"It died in 1958," he said. "Under the threat of a war with a tyrannical and vicious government in Russia. There were weapons only the scientists understood; they were the weapons that saved America. Science was lionized after that, of course, and the idea of a scientific government was immensely popular. Americans have a habit of lionizing their war heroes. In the election of 1960, a scientific party was elected. A benevolent dictatorship grew naturally out of that."

"Why?" she asked. "You said naturally. Why is that the natural outgrowth of a scientific government?"

"Because it's the most efficient form of government."

She looked at him blankly. "You mean that? Why are you fighting it, then?"

"Efficiency is only one test of government, honey. Justice is the big test. And justice is not a measurable, tangible, concrete thing. It cannot be calculated with a slide rule."

"But the people. All the people. They submitted to this?"

"It's hard to understand that, unless you understand the times. Unless you understand about politicians and pressure groups and some of the verbose opportunists who crowded our legislative halls. Unless you read some of the canned editorials in the chain newspapers, you can't imagine how confused the people were."

"But isn't—well, isn't what's best for the people—isn't that democracy?"

"No. What the people want, that's democracy. It's not always good and it's not always intelligent, but it's democracy. It wasn't leaders America needed. We had too many of those. It was teachers—and we had very damned few of those."

She smiled at him. "Teachers to give them the Truth?"

"Lower case truth. And to give them faith. To teach them the three D's—dignity and discipline and decency. To teach them—no matter how poor their equipment—to think for themselves, and not be guided too much by the over articulate. You see, the people knew what they wanted, but there were too many people telling them the different ways to get these things."

"And you want to go back to that confused time?"

"I want to go back. I want it with all of its vulgarities and evils and mediocrities. I want to come into the future slowly, with them, in our dumb, earnest, ornery, democratic way."

"George," she said, and her eyes were wet. "George, you're a sentimentalist. You, George, of all people."

"Right. And you?"

"Me too," she said.

"Welcome, darling," he said. "Welcome to the Cause."

"George, we could go back. Father could arrange it. In a time chamber, George."

"Yes, we could. But not my friends, not the people."

"I SEE," she said. "I see now, and forgive me for suggesting it. Now, tell me about the golf."

"It's the story," he said, "of efficiency carried to its extreme. The extreme of efficiency is idiocy, and I'll let Danny explain it when he comes after lunch. And what's for lunch?"

"Soy bean soup."

"Just that?"

"Just that. It's got everything, you know, the way it's treated."

"Everything but flavor," George agreed. "And that, I suppose, isn't really important."

"Not today," she said. "George, I've just thought of a prayer."

"To Truth?"

"To God."

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"Radical," he said. "Let's hear it."

"Dear God, please deliver me from people who take themselves seriously."

"I've been talking in my sleep," George said. "That's where you heard that one. Now to that luscious, flavorful, nutritious, irradiated soy bean soup."

Danny came after lunch. Danny said, "I've been talking to Joe, over at the club. You know, Joe Devlin." He glanced meaningfully at Jean.

"Jean's in," Danny said. "She's with us. Is Joe?"

"Solid," Danny said. "Welcome, Jean. I knew from the first time I saw you, you were one of us. But husbands, you know—"

"Tell me about Joe," George interrupted.

"Joe thinks if we armed them all with brassies, and the women with five irons, and like that. Joe's on the bloody side, I'm afraid, George."

Jean said, "You mean, this is to be a bloodless revolution?"

"That, or none," George said. "We don't follow the current philosophy of the end justifying the means."

"I've a name for your Cause, then," Jean said, "if you'll pardon the cliche. How would Hopeless Cause sound?"

"That's what I like about the movement," Danny said, "the unflinching optimism of the initiates."

"Well, " Jean said, "we're certainly not going to do it with words. Or even laughs. Had you some other weapons in mind?"

Both of them shook their heads.

"I CAN understand your nostalgia for the confused past, then. You boys just want to go home."

George looked at her levelly. "Don't you, Jean?"

"Yes. And, being a woman, I mean to go there. I intend to get what I want."

"Are we speaking literally or figuratively?" George asked. "Do you mean, home to Papa?"

"I mean both," she said. "Dad should be at his laboratory in another half hour. I'm going to see him."

Danny looked at George. George looked at Jean.

Finally, George said, "He's not one of us, Jean."

"Don't be so sure. He was under the influence of my mother a long time, and he's a man who loves peace. You boys might be wrong about Dad."

"Jean," Danny said impatiently, "he's a scientist. He's a number one citizen."

"And a human being," Jean asserted.

Danny looked at George, and shrugged.

George looked at Jean, and smiled. "I love her," he said, "and believe in her. Isn't that a corny thought?"

"Right out of the twentieth century," Danny agreed. "But I share it."

When she left, George and Danny sat in the living room. George said, "It's what we need, of course. We're all jerks, more or less. A real leader is what we need, a class one boy."

"An incorruptible class one citizen," Danny corrected him. "You were afraid I'd go too fast, George. And now Jean's talking to the enemy."

"You said you trusted her, Danny."

"I trust her intent. She isn't trained in double-talk."

"Not trained, no. But women are intuitive double-talkers. Danny, we haven't any weapons, any bloodless weapons."

They were silent. Through the audo-news relay, through the wiring that couldn't be switched off, the speaker boomed: "The Book is the Word and the Word is Truth."

"Two o'clock," Danny said.

George stood up. "Like a drink?"

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"What kind?"

"Canned heat and anise oil."

"It's better than nothing," Danny said glumly. "Damn it, damn it."

George frowned. "There's no sense in fretting. This is the big try. We've been kidding ourselves, you know. We're great talkers. Jean, a new member, has gone right to the heart of the matter. Women are the realists, Danny. They always have been."

"And if she fails, we won't have anything to kid ourselves about. If she fails, we'll be realists awful quick. Reality will come in bunches."

THEY HAD a few drinks, and played a game of chess. From the audo-news relay boomed: "Knowledge is power. The truth shall make you free."

"Three o'clock," Danny said. "All truth is temporary. Yesterday's superstition is today's science."

"And yesterday's science is today's superstition," George answered.

But they didn't smile. There was no lightness in their voices.

At three-thirty, George was in the kitchen getting a drink of water when the Tertiary turned in the driveway.

He called to Danny, "She's home." He paused, and his voice was lower: "He's with her, Danny. She's brought her father along."

Danny was on his feet in the living room, and George was standing next to him when the front door opened.

Jean came in—smiling.

Her father followed her. He was a thin man, with white hair, dark blue eyes and a grave, pallid face. He was a man George had never been able to understand. He never felt comfortable around him.

He said, "Good afternoon, George. Good afternoon, Danny."

Danny nodded, smiling dimly. George said, "Good afternoon, Mr. Hoskins. Staying for supper, aren't you?"

"Let's not pretend, George," he said. "I'm with you."

Danny expelled his breath audibly. George said, "Welcome, sir."

"On one condition," Mr. Hoskins added. He sat in the big chair near the front windows. "Is there . . . something to drink around?"

"Just vanilla," George said. "Danny and I drank up the canned heat."

"Vanilla will do it. Lemon extract's better, if you have it. I'll see that Jean gets some alcohol from the laboratory. Before you go, let me tell you the condition that qualifies my assistance. I want to be sure the people are on our side. The majority, George."

"We'll poll them," George said. "I can almost guarantee a majority. But we'll poll them." He went to get the vanilla.

HE SAT in the big chair, class one citizen Alan Hoskins, a drink in his hand and the light making a halo of his white hair. His voice was weary but controlled as he told them about the cosmic time blanket.

"There are quite a few of us on your side, George, and we've been working on it secretly. It would encompass all the known inhabitated planets in this sphere. It can only take us back, not forward into time. Have you thought of a year?"

"Tentatively—1950."

Mr. Hoskins nodded. "It was a year of decision, I think. It was a terribly confused time, George."

George nodded. "But we've knowledge, now, that—"

"That you won't take back. You're no . . . scientist, are you, George?"

"I have to call the auto club to change a tire," George agreed. "You mean there will be no memory in the people of this time?"

"None. They will be in 1950. The decisions they make may be even more . . . catastrophic than the decisions that led to this time. Perhaps

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they will be decisions that will lead Terra to global suicide. That's why the majority must decide this."

"In our dumb way," George added.

Hoskins was quiet. George looked at Danny.

Danny said, "We'll contact the Cells, all of them. Majority decision—that's the start to the past."

Throughout the spherical realm, to all the Cells, the big question went. From Galaxy E to Minus, from Futura to Ardee, around the realm. And the answers came back, the big answer.

The big 'YES'.

In the kitchen of the Curtis home, this warm morning in 2037, Jean said, "Now, aren't you glad you confided in me, George? Takes a woman to get things done. Today's the day, darling."

George was grave. "Today's the day."

Jean started to hum. It was an old tune, but George recognized it. It was *Sentimental Journey*.

He said, "Damn it, I wish I could be sure this was right. I wish I could be certain about something for once in my life."

"That's what we're leaving, sureness and certainty," Jean said. "That's one thing we know we don't want. And it's a little too late to fret, now."

She pointed at the brown, plastic audo-news above the kitchen table. It was starting to disappear!

George's stomach was hollow, and he could scarcely get the words out: "Darling, how do we know we'll be together? Darling, I never thought of that. We—"

"We don't know anything, George," she said quietly.

And then the void, the nothing, the soundless vacuum that was travel through time.

"IT MUST be some story," Jean said. "I can understand your ignoring me behind a newspaper, but this is the first time in our short and happy married life you ignored me from behind a magazine."

George looked up at his lovely wife. He looked at the cretonne curtains of the breakfast nook, ruffled by the warm breeze. He shook his head and stared at the cherry red plastic table top.

From the small radio on the perch above them came the nasal twang of hillbilly music. George took a deep breath.

"It must be some story," Jean repeated. "What kind is it?"

"Science fiction. Damnedest story I ever read."

"Good?"

"Nothing special. But the hero's name is George Curtis."

"So? I wish I had a dime for every George Curtis in the world."

"Sure. Sure. Only this George Curtis is married to a girl named Jean and he has a friend named Danny and the president of the Bryn Meadows golf club, where he's a member, is named Joe Devlin. And his boss' name is Kellner and his father-in-law's name is Alan Hoskins. How coincidental can you get?"

"Some friend of yours," Jean guessed. "What's the author's name?"

"Gault, William Campbell Gault. The guy's a hack, but who, how, where—"

"Danny, I'll bet," Jean said. "It's his idea of a gag. Remember, once he said, 'Writers with three names are dead, or ought to be'? He used three names, in this one."

"That wasn't Danny, that was Cabell," George corrected her. "And Danny is not a writer. The sale of two poems to the *Weekly Shopping News* does not make Danny a writer." He glanced at the clock. "I'm late. I've got to hurry."

"I thought you were going to play

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golf with Danny today."

"Not today. You read the story and you'll see why. 'Bye." He kissed her on the forehead, and was gone.

Jean watched the Plymouth tear out of the driveway, then she picked up the magazine. It was the March 1951 issue of AMAZING STORIES.

She opened to the story called "Let's Do it Again!" and began to read: *The sun was warm; the breeze ruffling the filmo curtains of the breakfast nook was warm. George Curtis, third class citizen...*

THE END

TURBINE TOPICS

By Salem Lane

IT'S NO news to anyone that jet-planes for example are replacing the conventional type—even in commercial aviation. The gas turbine is coming into its own. Even many propellor driven planes are using gas turbine drives. Ten years ago we predicted this would be the case when gas turbines first came to the public attention.

The gas turbine is the power unit of the future!

What is a gas turbine? What makes it superior to a reciprocating engine powered by gas or steam? In the case of aircraft use, the obvious answer is that the turbine is a *concentrated* power package. But what about other uses? It so happens that many electric power plants are beginning to use gas turbines instead of the conventional steam turbines. Why?

The answer is efficiency and simplicity. A gas turbine requires only the fuel-burning unit and the rotor blades themselves. No chain of boilers, radiators, and all their complicated associated equipment is required. This means that energy is produced that much more cheaply. The gas turbine is the actual prime-mover of the future.

No revolution has really taken place. Instead, there is a slow but steady drift toward the employment of these gadgets. An outfit here tries them, then one there, and before long, large numbers of people and plants are using them. The automotive field—that of large trucks—is just about ready to drift into their use. Stationary power plants also are using them as has been mentioned.

The gas turbine behaves almost as simply as an electric motor. In farm and earth-moving machinery this will indeed be a boon. In fact in any mobile machinery, the gas turbine beats the reciprocating engine all hollow. Helicopters await the application of gas turbines.

So, we can see the inevitable trend. Another thirty years will probably see the reciprocator as obsolete and as dead as the dodo. The putt-putt of ordinary engines will no longer be heard. Instead, only the high, keening wail of the high speed gas turbine will be heard in the land!

SCIENTIFIC GLUE-POT!

By Jon Barry

ONE OF the most pressing needs of the modern world is for a synthesizer, a "gluer", a compounder, an "Assembler" who can do something with the enormous amounts of data that are available. The whole scientific world is ripe for such a mentality. If there was such a thing as a super mental organizer, he'd find a spot without any trouble!

For the last forty or fifty years from laboratories, shops, observatories, and libraries enormous amounts of facts have been discovered. This is true in all of the sciences ranging from astronomy to zoology. Right now it would require an enormous single building just to house the millions of scientific papers which are available.

Now it is a fact that one mind can only comprehend and be familiar with a limited amount of material. In fact in one field, let us say like mathematics, the mathematician usually has but one narrow specialty and the rest of the subject is as much Greek to him as to you or I.

Consequently he can't see the organic over-all relationship between his subject and the rest. He can't, in other words, see the forest for the trees! Yet, the very essence of the great advances in science are dependant upon unifying and correlating and assimilating these remote and different things. From such activities come real knowledge and further gigantic advances.

A Maxwell, an Einstein, a Cantor come forward and make such a synthesis and science jumps forward a thousand strides. A Planck appears in the picture and again physics bounces skyward.

But such men are rare and far between. What we need is some form of education that can produce men who can relate one thing to another. We might call them "modest Leonardo da Vincis".

The problem is appreciated of course, and efforts are being made by men of good will and ordinary intelligence to look over whole fields in an effort to combine them. Witness biophysics and medico-mechanics. These are minute examples. We need a dozen Newtons, a hundred Gausses, a thousand Einsteins!

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BACTERIAL WARNING

By June Lurie

NO SIRENS will blow, no fires will be started, no buildings will crumble into dust in the event of an attack by an enemy with the most insidious weapon of all —bacteria! But in spite of the lack of fanfare, the technicians will be—are—on guard night and day. Bacterial warfare, subtle as it is, may still be combatted effectively by a determined peoples, just as most assaults, no matter how dreadful they seem at first, may be.

The Public Health departments of a hundred major cities are constantly on the alert for the appearance of disease and they serve as the first-line defense against a bacteriological attack. Should such an event take place, it would not be known immediately, but after a short time, when syptoms began manifesting themselves, most certainly the first to know would be these Public Health groups. And they are prepared. In an instant, the moment awareness of the danger came, serums, and preventive action would be given and taken.

Food supplies, water supplies and their sources would be checked even as they are right now. Infected persons would be isolated and crude but efficient hospital facilities on a vast scale would be thrown into use. Doctors and civilian assistants would be mobilized. Every conceivable step would be taken to oppose the spread of the disease.

It so happens that no enemy could hurl an unknown agent at us. Bactoriology is a rigid science and only certain bacterial agents are suitable for such warfare. We can fight these with known techniques. The one rough factor to consider is the almost inevitable bombing and military assault that would accompany any bactericidal war. In the resultant confusion and disturbance of normal routines, bacterial warfare might make some inroads. But as a general bet, it would not be the enemy's best weapon. It is, in particular, a double-edged sword. An enemy would have to be mighty confident to employ it without fearing a thousand-fold retaliation.

As dangerous as bactoriological warfare sounds, it is comparatively innocuous to a people who are adequately prepared and in these matters of public health, the United States is second to none. Sit back and relax—the *anthrax bacilli* won't get us!

PROJECT PHOENIX . . .

By William Karney

AT LONG last some private citizens and organizations are making a concerted physical effort to take some of atomic research out of the hands of the government! The University of Michigan has set up a project which is designed to do atomic research on non-military levels, on things such as tracers, power and so forth.

Nuclear research up until now as everyone knows has been an ultra-ultra secret proposition which by its very secrecy tends to strangle itself. If Jack doesn't know what Hank is doing how can scientific advances be made. To destroy this bottleneck is Michigan's aim.

In its project—project Phoenix—it seeks to enlist the aid of private citizens and private industries to set up a full scale institute for nuclear research, exactly like those the government maintains. But the new research institute will have no secrets about it. Information (within the United States) will be freely disseminated, available to all objective and disinterested scientists who want it. This is a far cry from today!

Should any discoveries be made which might have military value they will be at once turned over to the proper authorities in the government. But everything else will be widely publicized. It is a bitter criterion of governmental policy that private organizations have to do this, but the authors of the plan see the tremendous self-strangling danger inherent in the governmental work which isolates every department from every other department. Effective broad-scale research can't be done that way.

These magazines have run many criticisms of the government's hyper-secret methods where atomic research is concerned. It is a pleasure to realize that so many and such influential other groups feel the same way. We must not let a single shred of information of military value leak out to the potential enemy but on the other hand, we mustn't hurt our own efforts by clamping the lid on everything.

Science only works best in freedom, particularly freedom of communication between researchers. Without this freedom, each man is an island unto himself, without inspiration or fire. Great results don't come from those circumstances. Thank God, this is finally realized. Get to work boys, and really produce!

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PINK WIND

By Frances M. Deegan

The strange creatures moved back as Wren lashed out at the giant in a savage blow

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Crimp Haggerty was known as the biggest liar of all time. So naturally nobody believed his story of the source of X-metal on Vulcan

THE SEARCH for Crimp Haggerty had been going on for two years, when Bob Wren brought Crimp's daughter Lala back from Venus. The girl was half Venusian, with long purple eyes, a tiny nose, yellow skin and flowing black hair. She had all the tricks and manners of the yellow Venusians, but there was earthly intelligence there too, beneath her shallow prattle and playful habits. It was that intelligence which made her difficult to handle; besides which, she had inherited her father's gift for plain and fancy lying.

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Wren was convinced she was Haggerty's daughter, and if anybody could identify the old reprobate, Lala was that person. He had a hunch he knew where to look next for Haggerty. The Intelligence Department had followed leads which took them far and wide throughout the Solar system, and added nothing good to Haggerty's reputation. The one place they had not looked was right under their noses in the settlements around Central Spaceport on Earth. If Haggerty had managed to slip through quarantine with faked papers, he would not find it so easy to slip out again. Regulations had tightened considerably since his last known visit to Earth some ten years before.

Although Crimp Haggerty was featured prominently on all "wanted" lists, the local police had never found the slightest hint of his presence.

Wren took Lala with him when he went to make his preliminary report, but the Chief was not amused. Lala ran to his desk, leaned far over and spit at him.

"Liar!" she shrilled. "You are not my father."

Wren grabbed her and gave her a hard spank. She backed away, rubbing the place and smiling venomously.

"This man is the Chief," Wren said. "You have offended him, and you have offended me. Nobody said he was your father. Now, you will be punished hard."

"Liar," she said softly, and licked her lips.

"You have spoiled her," the Chief accused grimly.

"Not I. She was like that when I caught her. She's Haggerty's daughter, and she's going to help me find him."

"Where?"

"Right here, I hope. He left Venus three years ago, bound for Mars on the Centillion, which was on the triplanet run at the time. I think he left the ship here when she was laid up for repairs, instead of completing the round trip. I couldn't find any evidence of his return to Venus."

"What does she say?" the Chief snapped.

"She keeps changing her story. She has inherited her father's tendency to prevaricate...with frills."

Lala had begun to primp and preen without benefit of a mirror, and the Chief looked at her without pleasure. Brand Hickey was a solid, chunky man with a keen, hard mind. As Chief of the ID, he was seldom surprised and rarely pleased; but he was respected, not only by his own men, but by every other government department.

"Maybe she's not even his daughter," he growled, and shot a suspicious glance at Wren.

"I checked that," Wren said stiffly. "And I also found more samples of the X-metal in the hut where she was living. The bulk of the stuff is consigned to you and ought to be delivered shortly, but she's— Come here, Lala."

SHE CAME at once, lightfooted in soft leather mocassins, and leaned against him affectionately. He lifted a silky black cord of braided hair over her head, and she wailed and tried to scratch him. He held her off with an experienced grip, and tossed the ornament to the desk. A polished green metal object hung from the hairbraid necklace. It looked like an irregular lump of melted metal, with a loop formed by chance on one end through which the cord was strung.

The Chief picked it up and hitched his chair closer to the desk, turning it in his blunt fingers. He nodded his head slowly. "That's the stuff, all right. She know anything about it?"

"Aye me! Aye me!" Lala began

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to wail in a chant which grew louder and shriller with each repetition.

Wren shook his head and held out his hand. The ornament was quickly tossed back to him, and he slipped it over Lala's head as she tried to bite him, but the piercing chant stopped abruptly. She whirled suddenly toward the Chief and he threw up his arms defensively, but Wren caught her and backed her away out of range.

"I don't think she knows where it came from. To her, it's just a good luck charm which her father brought her. Apparently, she's fond of him, so I'm counting on a spontaneous reunion if he's anywhere around here."

"You'll have your hands full taking her through the dives where he's likely to be hanging out. He knows he's wanted on smuggling charges, quite aside from our interest in the X-metal, and he certainly won't be alone. You may have trouble proving his identity, since he and his daughter are both practiced liars."

"I know." Wren nodded thoughtfully, and glanced at Lala who was once more absorbed in her endless primping. "That's the one thing that keeps bothering me, why the Department is willing to go to so much trouble and expense to find the guy, when he's such a big liar that nothing he says can be relied upon, even after we get him."

"There's no doubt but what he went to Vulcan on the only known expedition to that planet twenty years ago. There were three ships, and he was captain of one. The other two were never heard from, but he turned up again on Venus. What's more, he carried a letter from Captain Blaylock to his wife, written on Vulcan, and mentioning the fact that our subject had quarreled with the man leading the expedition and was returning."

"Of course, that's no proof that the X-metal came from Vulcan."

"No," the Chief admitted. "We have nothing but subject's word for that. He donated a good-sized hunk of the stuff to old Cap Mulligan's museum, and that's how it was tagged. When Mulligan died, the stuff was all turned over to the government, and some bright boy got curious about the chunk of Vulcan and started running tests on it. You know the rest."

WREN NODDED. "So now they want to see more of the mysterious X-metal, but they don't want to send an expedition to Vulcan without further proof. By the time they get through hunting our guy, they'll have spent enough to outfit an expedition in the first place."

"Not quite," the Chief said dryly. "The reason subject is so valuable is because the situation is so unusual. The planet Vulcan was discovered nearly a thousand years ago, way back in the Twentieth Century, but except for that one known expedition, it has never been visited. Observatory reports show it to be without life of any kind, smoldering with interior heat, and lashed by violent storms. As far as we can find out, our subject is the only man alive who has been there and back. All the rest of the crew of his expedition ship have died or vanished in the past twenty years. Also, the X-metal is not to be found anywhere else in the solar system. It was only by chance that its potential value was discovered."

Wren shook his head and grimaced in disbelief. "The facts don't hang together, Chief. According to the lab reports, the stuff is not pure metal, but a mysterious alloy, which should indicate that it was produced by some form of intelligent life. But according to observatory reports, life on Vulcan is impossible."

"There may have been life at some time in the remote past. Although,"

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the Chief admitted, "that also seems impossible. The core of the planet is still dangerously hot; it must have been much hotter in the past. However, our speculations don't count, and won't get us anywhere. All we have to do is follow orders. In this case, the order came from the top, so let's not question it out loud. I'll get you a special permit for her, but you'll have to take full responsibility. If she gets loose, or causes any trouble, it'll be on your head. Meanwhile, you'd better put her in detention and file your formal report. And don't spare the details. The Department doesn't look too good on this job, so do what you can to help me convince them how tough it's been, and how thorough we've been."

"I'll make it good," Wren grinned. "I had to fight her whole tribe to get this baby away from them. And those samples of metal ought to be a big help. That makes the trail look hot, whether it is or not."

"If it is," the Chief murmured, "if you turn him up here, there'll be a nice bonus for you, Bob. The Department has had too many men tied up for too long on this thing. The old scoundrel is more slippery than a needle in a haystack. And in our case, we don't know which haystack he's riding in." He flipped a thumb at Lala. "You better put her back together before you take her out of here."

"Lala! Put your dress on," Wren said sharply. She had taken it off, and was trying to drape it around her lithe midsection, humming contentedly over the task.

WREN STARTED toward her, and she tried to put it on upside down, giggling delightedly. He finally got it pulled down over her head, his face reddening with the effort as the Chief looked on sardonically.

"It doesn't pay to spoil them," the Chief remarked dryly.

"I don't want to antagonize her," Wren explained somewhat sheepishly. 'She'd be no help to me at all if I abused her."

"Well, she's your problem. You brought her here on your own initiative. Don't blame the Department if she cuts your throat."

"I won't," Wren said shortly. "Leave it on!" he admonished the wriggling Lala. "We're going out."

Her slim, lithe body was suddenly still, she drew herself up with dignity, and walked to the door with regal grace. Suddenly, she whirled and spat an ugly name at the Chief, adding, "Liar! Thief!"

Unmoved, the Chief flipped a palm outward in the universal gesture of rejection that said plainer than words, "Take her away."

Wren took her, and not without some difficulty, left her in detention. Her wailing chant followed him down the corridor from a private cell as he left.

He spent the entire day on his report, heeding the Chief's injunction to include all details and difficulties. Before he was finished, he was gratified to hear that receipt of the X-metal samples had occasioned some excitement in the Department of Metals and Minerals. The mysterious combination of elements was consistently the same in all the specimens, and it was that combination which gave the stuff its high value. It was exactly what was needed in the construction of powerful communication equipment. No other known metal or alloy could be made to meet the specifications. But if the source of the X-medal could be discovered, it would be possible to produce equipment that would bridge vast distances, and would be the final step in man's conquest of time and space.

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Wren sighed, and thought of the disreputable old space Rover he was hunting. So often in the glorious history of humanity, the greatest advances depended upon a frail and inglorious individual. Almost as if Fate meant to teach man humility in his greatness....

The special permit for Lala was delivered to his quarters, but it was evening before he returned to the detention building. The superintendent met him with cold disapproval.

"I thought you told us that Venusian devil was not wild," he said. "She should have been assigned to Psycho Treatment."

"What's she done?" Wren sighed resignedly.

"Scratched up two women guards, wrecked the cell, and screamed all day. She wouldn't eat either, so it was impossible to slip her a narcotic."

"I don't want her drugged," Wren snapped. "I'll take her off your hands right now."

"You will not!" the Super declared. "I can't release anything in that condition, and you know it. Just what," he added icily, "do you think you're trying to get away with?"

"Confidential business," Wren returned coldly, and showed the special permit with ID seal and signature.

"Oh, a special," the Super muttered dubiously, and looked more closely at Wren who still wore the uniform of Executive Officer in the Inter-Planetary Transport. "O-oh. You're ID. I thought...the uniform, of course...never know where you fellows are going to turn up."

"You can check with the ID—afterwards," Wren snapped, and went toward the cell corridor. There was no sound of screaming now, and he said: "If you've done anything to quiet her—"

"No, no. I'm sure nothing has been done. She may have harmed herself, but I can't be responsible for that."

WREN QUICKENED his pace and looked into a cell where food had been splashed and smeared, utensils and bedding scattered, and the inmate totally disrobed. She was huddled in one corner now with her clothes lying in shreds about her. Wren snatched the key from the Super and entered the cell with every intention of administering a sound thrashing. But she saw him with a pitiful moan and ran to him shivering and sobbing.

"I told you I'd come back!" he said harshly, and picked up a torn blanket to cover her. "Get some clothes," he ordered the gaping Super. "Something bright."

"Liar!" Lala sobbed. "He is not my father."

"Confound it, I didn't say he was! You should be punished hard for behaving like this."

"I did! I did! I punished me. All my clothes—see?"

"I can think of a better way than that. Now, listen carefully. It's dark night—"

"Liar! It is bright light."

"No. I've tried to explain that to you. Here, we have quick light and quick dark, one after the other. Not like the long light and dark on Venus. You'll see when we go out. And where we are going, the dark is dangerous. You must be a lady and stay close to me."

"Yeahss?" She blinked liquid eyes at him and leaned forward attentively as he told her carefully how to behave, promising dire results if she didn't.

THE SETTLEMENTS around Central Spaceport were seldom mentioned, officially or otherwise. Efforts to regulate them had proved unavailing, and they had come to be con-

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sidered a necessary evil. All races and forms of life met and mingled here and formed native groups, both for protection and pleasure. Strange vices and odd customs were practiced, and afterwards carried to other worlds. It was regrettable, but not surprising, that the vices were more infectious than the virtues.

Lala behaved well. She was delighted with the carnival atmosphere of the settlements. Nor was it strange to see an officer of the Inter-Planetary Transport escorting a female from another world. There were many such couples and groups, seeking gayety and excitement after the strain of a long space voyage. But as the night wore on and they penetrated deeper into the less frequented regions of the settlements, Wren grew more watchful and cautious. The darker resorts were less hospitable, and the customers seemed to take their vices much more seriously.

It was a time and place to tread warily, and Wren kept a tight hold on Lala's arm as they entered a dusky, nondescript drinking place which seemed to cater to the riff-raff of all worlds. Wren suspected that more than drinks were dispensed here. In spite of the ID and well-trained customs guards, strange and powerful drugs found their way from one world to another, although not all creatures derived the same effect from all drugs. A comparatively harmless medicinal herb from Mars produced a fiery stimulant for the sluggish natives of Saturn and Pluto. And there were many similar examples of the old adage; "One man's meat is another man's poison." Which made it impossible to control the illegal traffic around Central Spaceport.

Near the front of the shabby room, a slender, pale Martian leaned on the bar. He eyed Lala indolently and grinned at Wren. His companion was a short, redheaded Earthman who kept his eyes scrupulously lowered to the glass of yellow liquor in front of him. His name was Ganz, and Wren had once arrested him on Mars for jewel smuggling. His nerves quickened as he realized this must be a smuggler's hangout, as well as a dope den. He knew in the same moment that Ganz would undoubtedly tip them off. He was half-minded to turn around and leave, when Lala broke away, screaming: "Lars! Lars!" She flung herself at a blond giant and he snatched her up like a baby, roaring her name.

"What the hell you doing here?" he bellowed, and hard blue eyes swung on Wren as he approached.

THE GIANT put Lala down carefully and planted himself before Wren with great fists doubled menacingly. The assorted toughs all understood the signs of combat and moved back from the pair. But Lala cried out again and ran to meet a grizzled, bushy-haired roughneck who stepped out of the crowd at the back. He embraced her quickly and pulled her back to where Wren and Lars confronted each other.

Wren had to make a split-second decision, and he didn't hesitate. His left lashed out in a savage blow to the stomach that bent the giant and took all the steam out of the belated drive of his big fist. It slid past Wren's jaw and swung around his neck. Wren was set, and uncorked a right that cracked like a shot, and turned the big red face ceilingward as the giant dropped with a thud that shook the flimsy shack. There were gasps of awe from all sides, and the thin voice of Ganz behind Wren said: "I told you!"

Lala covered her mouth with her palm, looking down at Lars. Suddenly, she clapped her hands gleefully

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and laughed with rippling delight. Wren acted by instinct then. Breathing heavily, but still watchful, he held out his hand and Lala ran to him and leaned affectionately in the curve of his arm. It released the tension in the dusky room. The pantomime explained matters to the satisfaction of all the alien minds in the place. It was a man and woman matter, and it had been settled. They returned to their own affairs, leaving the unfortunate Lars to struggle out of his black pit alone.

"I want to talk to you, Crimp," Wren said quietly. The grizzled oldtimer eyed him with one eye squinted half shut and the other hard and round under a bushy eyebrow. The hooked nose, long jaw and cruel mouth gave him a piratical look, but there was hard intelligence there, too.

His eyes slid over Wren's shoulder without changing, and Wren guessed he was getting the high sign from somebody behind him, probably Ganz. He remained as he was, with one arm around Lala.

"Lala," Crimp said huskily, "is this man police?"

"Yes," Lala answered clearly. "He is ID and he wants to talk to you about the metal from Vulcan. It is important. They are very anxious. He did not come here for anything else."

Wren was surprised, but not overwhelmed by her quick answer. He had suspected all along that she was much more intelligent than she appeared to be.

"Why did you hit Lars?" Crimp asked curiously.

"I had to dispose of him quick. If I had waited, you would have set him on me, and if I had waited, I might not have been successful."

Crimp nodded and grinned tightly. "He may get another chance, but I'll talk to you—in the back."

Lars was stirring feebly, and Crimp encouraged him with a jostling foot. The giant crawled clumsily to his feet, and stood swaying, still shocked and dazed by the incredible experience.

"No man ever knocked me down before," he mumbled, not angrily, but with a kind of wonder. "No man. Not even...on Pluto..."

"We'll get him to tell you how he did it," Crimp said dryly. "Go on back to the booth."

Lars went obediently, stumbling a little, and Crimp motioned Wren to follow. Lala still clung to him, and the old Rover brought up the rear. Little open curiosity was displayed, but Wren knew the sign had gone around, and they all knew him for what he was, and watched him through the dusk with cat eyes. Caution would no longer serve him here, it was a matter of gauging his opponent, and judging accurately, playing his cards at the right time.

THE ESTABLISHMENT was much larger than it appeared to be. A long double row of fully enclosed booths extended back for some distance. Curtains shrouded the low entrance of each. Lars entered a booth and slumped down on the bench at one side of the dimly lit table. Lala and Wren took the other side, and Crimp Haggerty joined Lars. He produced a long, slender bottle from the floor and poured a drink for Lars. The liquid was colorless and exuded a sharp, acrid odor. It was the forbidden Lespe from Mars, and Crimp re-corked the bottle and put it back without offering it to anyone else. The liquor revived Lars with fiery suddenness, and he grinned at Wren expectantly.

Wren tipped his hand at Lars in acknowledgment, and addressed Crimp: "You must be awfully damned tired of being stuck here. Aren't you about ready to go out?"

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"You got a deal?" Crimp husked.

"I have. Why did you quit the expedition on Vulcan twenty years ago?"

"The pink wind," Crimp whispered harshly. "The goddam blasting pink wind. And nobody will believe me. It ruined me. I lost my rating because everybody believed I deserted. But I was right. I know I was. I tried to get the other ships to leave with me...."

Wren had hit a gusher on the first try. All the time and effort he had put in studying this man's past history, and reconstructing his character, now paid off. That fatal expedition had become an obsession with him, and wherever he tried to tell his story, men laughed in disbelief. This time, nobody laughed. He couldn't have asked for a more attentive listener than Wren, or a more sympathetic one. Because Crimp Haggerty at one time had been tops as a space captain, and Wren knew it, and knew that his fall into criminal activities must have been bitter and painful for a man of his brilliant talent.

As Crimp talked, an idea began forming in Wren's mind, an explanation of the mystery of the X-metal. He probed at various points of Crimp's story, had him repeat certain details, and all the time became more and more sure of his theory. Finally, he offered Crimp the deal which he was authorized to make. If he could re-discover the source of the X-metal, all his past sins would be wiped out, as far as the ID was concerned.

When Wren left the shadowy resort, Crimp Haggerty and Lars Larson went with him....

BOB WREN stood on a jagged outcropping among the tortured gray crags and spires on Vulcan. The wind was powerful and he clung to the rock, secure enough in the specially designed suit that was like scaled armor. Even his face and skull were covered with it, and he looked out through lenses that could be adjusted to distance.

Below him in the center of a vast bowl, a large, silvery-white blister was growing imperceptibly. Even under the leaden sky that covered the planet, the gigantic blister glowed with unnatural menace.

Beside Wren, Crimp Haggerty watched with him. But now he knew what the blister was, and was not terrified, only anxious to get away in time. He touched Wren's arm with a hard push, and nodded his head forcefully, and they turned and made their way back to where the two expedition ships were loaded and waiting. The data they carried was almost as important as the black bars and chunks of metal which had exploded and scattered in the time of the pink wind, when the skin of another molten blister had burst.

Locks were slammed to, and the first ship took off immediately, and quickly vanished in the murk. The second ship with Wren and Haggerty aboard, lifted more slowly and drifted back over the ragged, storm tormented landscape. They passed over the first deep bowl and crossed more of the nightmare spires and crags. And then Wren saw it far in the distance, sweeping down and across the ash gray rock—the pink wind, searing and blasting its way like the fires of Hell let loose.

"By Heaven, it is pink!" he said, in a surge of unaccustomed emotion. "You were right, Crimp. We were both right."

"Lift, goddam it!" Crimp was roaring at the ship's captain. "Up and out of it, you fool. If we're caught—"

The captain was galvanized into action, and the ship lurched and nosed up in a reckless blast that nearly

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prostrated all on board. And yet, so fast was the fury of the pink wind, that they barely cleared, and behind them, the blister they had watched burst in a terrifying blaze of white heat that turned blood red, and increased the color and fury of the pink wind.

A WHILE afterward, the captain relaxed and wiped the sweat off his face. "So that was it!" he said with a good deal less than his usual authoritative firmness. "Vulcan. That ball of hell was well named."

"Now you've seen it," Haggerty said with his old bitterness.

Wren stretched in his chair, and eyed Haggerty a little sadly. "We've seen it, and you're clean, Crimp. After all these years. Think you'll stay clean?"

"Hell, I'm gettin' old," Haggerty grumbled. "Too old for the fast game. You don't have to worry about me any more."

The captain seemed to find this reference to Crimp's evil doing embarrassing, and turned the talk back to the wonders they had just witnessed.

"We took an awful chance," he said. "If that damned thing had caught us, we'd have burned down to ash in seconds." He turned on Wren, suddenly realizing the slim margin of escape they had had. "You knew the danger, you had no right to insist—"

"Crimp was entitled to it," Wren said. "Unless we had seen it, there would still be some doubt, and I promised him he would be cleared completely."

"I've seen it, but I still don't understand it," the captain growled. "The very atmosphere ignites, but what keeps it going? Why doesn't the whole thing burn up in one fiery blast?"

"The planet cools as it turns," Wren said. "The air becomes moist, and the fire dies. It's a natural smelter and refinery with a core of molten metals which ooze out in those great blisters. The pink wind cracks off splinters of rock and drives them through the skin of the blisters, so that they explode successively; the molten metal cools and solidifies where it falls. Once the atmosphere ignites from the heat of the blisters, the explosions spread it and keep it going until the cool season damps it out."

"It's so simple," the captain said, "after you know. Hell, Crimp, your pink wind is going to make an awful lot of faces red."

"Serves 'em right," Crimp growled ungraciously. "I guess Lala—she'll be glad to see us when we hit Venus." He was watching Wren under the shaggy brush of his eyebrows.

Wren carefully said nothing, and after a long silence, Crimp asked bluntly: "You tell her you were taking her back to Earth with you?"

"No, I didn't tell her that."

"She said you did. She's a terrible liar. Gets it from her Venusian relatives. I guess you made a hit with her all right. I guess you'd treat her right. It's all right with me if you wanta take her."

Wren shuddered inwardly at the memory of Lala's capers, and said gently: "I appreciate your generosity, Crimp. But you don't have to go that far to show your gratitude. I wouldn't think of depriving you of your daughter now that you're getting old."

"Hell, I ain't that old!" Crimp roared indignantly. "I'm figurin' on applyin' for the Vulcan run. If anybody can outsmart that pink wind, I guess I can. I was kinda hopin' to get Lala settled in good hands before I take on a regular run again."

Big Lars pushed in from the passageway to report for duty at the con-

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trols. Before taking his place, however, he turned on Haggerty, his big fists swinging in short, tight arcs.

"You let anybody else get Lala," he said heavily, "and I kill him, and you, too."

Wren breathed a sigh of relief, and beamed at Lars admiringly. With a little manipulation, he could, he decided, bury that indictment Lars had hanging over him for smuggling on the Mars run. That was little enough to do for the man who had delivered him from Lala's charms.

THE END

HUMAN ENGINEERING . .

By H. R. Stanton

A MODERN science which is coming into its own, is that of "human engineering". It is really nothing new, and yet it is completely new. This apparent paradox is quite clear. It's one of those things which have always been with us but which we've failed to appreciate. Human engineering is essentially the science which concerns itself with tailoring machines to humans, rather than vice versa.

If you stop and reflect on the history of the industrial age of which we are a part, it is easy to see how the earliest machines were designed primarily to function without regard for their operation by humans. Thus, an engineer slapped a handle here, a control there, and as long as the thing ran, fine!

But this sort of thing is no longer adequate and engineers have at last come to realize it. Instead of simply designing a machine, be it a bread-cutter or a jet airplane, the engineers are thinking in terms of building the machine around the human —rather than just cramming him in. The result of such action is increased efficiency and comfort all the way around.

"Human engineers" are concerned with everything connecting a person with the gadget he is to operate. A housewife might want a more comfortable handle on her meat-knife, or a jet pilot might require more legible dials. The engineer gives them both their requests.

It has been discovered by long observation as well as experiment that adapting a machine to a human being makes the whole relationship that much more harmonious. You've noticed that yourself. If you're a fisherman you've said, "That rod feels perfect!" Or if you've played golf, you've exclaimed, "Gee, this driver is wonderful!" Unconsciously you were paying tribute to the engineer who designed them.

Where it counts, in planes and trucks and cars and ships and heavy industrial machinery, this sort of design pays off. An operator of a lathe turns out twice as much because he can operate the machine twice as easily. A pilot operates his plane with less fatigue and more confidence because the control knobs and handles seem to fit right and be exactly at the right spot.

You can go down the line and select a million examples of where this sort of thing is entering. Even Detroit is conscious of it, and there is a respectable movement to design an automobile in terms of these facts rather than in terms of the largest quantity of chromium.

An example of the methods which are used to study and plan this sort of thing, is the psychological laboratory which flies, an ingenious arrangement of recorders which photograph and electrically measure every response and activity of an airplane pilot while he is in flight. By the time a trial flight is finished the fatigue and unusual efforts of the pilot are completely and exactly recorded. A studied analysis of this record can then disclose to human engineers the changes which might make for better flying. The pilot may be utterly unaware of them, but when the changes are introduced, he suddenly finds himself —without knowing why—working much more easily.

This sort of engineering becomes more important with each complication that is introduced into a machine. Planes and jets are bad enough. But wait until the rocket! This machine will be a maze of complications requiring the utmost refinement of design to make it practical—or even possible—for a human being to control it.

You might think that this sensitivity to the human element in a mechanism would tend to make for complexity. It is exactly to the contrary. It is almost a corollary— the simpler, the easier.

Next time you have occasion to wander anywhere where there are gadgets, household appliances or what have you, make it a point to examine some of the design points about them. If possible compare them with pieces made just a few years before. Almost invariably you will discover—beneath the ridiculous streamlining effects, etc. (the flash and chrome)—that a sincere effort has been made to make the machine easier to use. This goes even so far as the handles on a door!

It bodes well for the future. The genuine push-button age doesn't seem nearly as far off as one might imagine. Already the engineers are trying to make it come true!

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GASEOUS MIX UP

By Milton Matthew

IF YOU BELIEVED the output of the propagandistic, chauvinistic Russian press, you'd think the Soviets invented everything and contributed all of science's benefits to humanity. Naturally this is a laugh. Good as the Soviets are, they by no means stand very high in the history of Western civilization with any great contributions. On the other hand, the Soviets have done first rate work in science and are still doing it. Science is independant of national origins.

Russian work in fundamental research isn't bad at all and they do a lot of it to judge by the numbers of papers they issue. A recent one, which promises to be very important has been checked by American laboratories and found to be absolutely correct.

It is a basic tenet of the kinetic theory of gases, that, if you mix two different gases, they become initimately mixed with each other, one "dissolving into the other." If you put a quart of hydrogen with a quart of oxygen the two gases flow one into the other until the resultant mixture, if sampled at random will show exactly even proportions. But not always!

That's the gist of the new discovery. It seems that if such a mixture of gases is exposed to great pressures, around fifty thousand pounds per square inch, the gases separate into two layers! Furthermore, if the pressure is still increased the gases separate into reversed layers, the former on top of the latter! The explanation for this fantastic behavior is unknown yet, but undoubtedly it will have extremely important repercussions in future scientific work, especially as related to atomic theory which in turn stems to a certain extent from high-prssure work. Kinetic theory offers no reason whatsoever for this odd behavior, in fact, doesn't even suggest at all that such a thing is possible much less true.

So, it can be seen that the Soviets do, once in a while, come up with some highly original research. The question is: are the scientists who did the work still alive?—or have they been sent to the Marxian paradise as have so many others?

ASTRONOMICAL WASTE

By Carter T. Wainwright

NATURE doesn't give two hoots in Hades! It really does things on an enormous scale with utter disregard for conservation. It is sheerly profligate, spending its heritage at a fantastic rate not at all concerned with human trivia. Many scientists have commented on this fact. It is as if Nature said: "That for you, you puny, feeble little men. Energy and power mean nothing to me and I shall squander them with impunity." Nature grins maliciously and throws off a few more million tons of matter-energy into deep dark space.

This personification of Nature's wasteful sense, isn't a crude attempt to be satirical. It is more a feeble protest of alarm at the heedless expenditure. But we must sit back and let it happen. Man doesn't yet control the Universe in spite of his technological mastery.

A superb example of this is the Sun itself. That gigantic body hurls away from itself four million tons of matter-energy per *second*. Despite that fantastic dispersal of useful energy, the vast majority of it vanishes into space to sink into the eternal heat-sink which is intersellar space. Some minute portion of it falls on Earth and warms this midget planet's chilled bones. This energy makes our world habitable. And we ourselves are not yet in a position to use it. We're living on the stored-up remnants of it from geologic times in the form of wood and coal and oil.

Another example of Nature's strange ways is found in incredibly inefficient biological processes. In all animal reproduction, including human, vast numbers of ova and sperms are created only to be wasted for just one of each is required to initiate the development of the new issue. Why this waste?

Then after the wasteful fertilization of the millions and millions and countless billions of creatures born, only a few ever reach adulthood. The problem that bothers the philosophers is that they can see no purpose at all behind this. There is not the slightest indication of why this general profligacy should be so.

Since modern physics has disclosed that randomness and chance appear to be the order of things (and they are the exact opposite of order) the confusion has been heightened. Is it the only universe or is it just one of many conceivable. Certainly if Man's hand were to be found in the grand design he would be more conservative.

"Ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do and die..." is not satisfactory. Perhaps we'll never discover the basic mechanism behind things, but at least the cake is worth the candle and scientists and philosophers will go on grinding out hypotheses till the end of time. Why, we ask, why?

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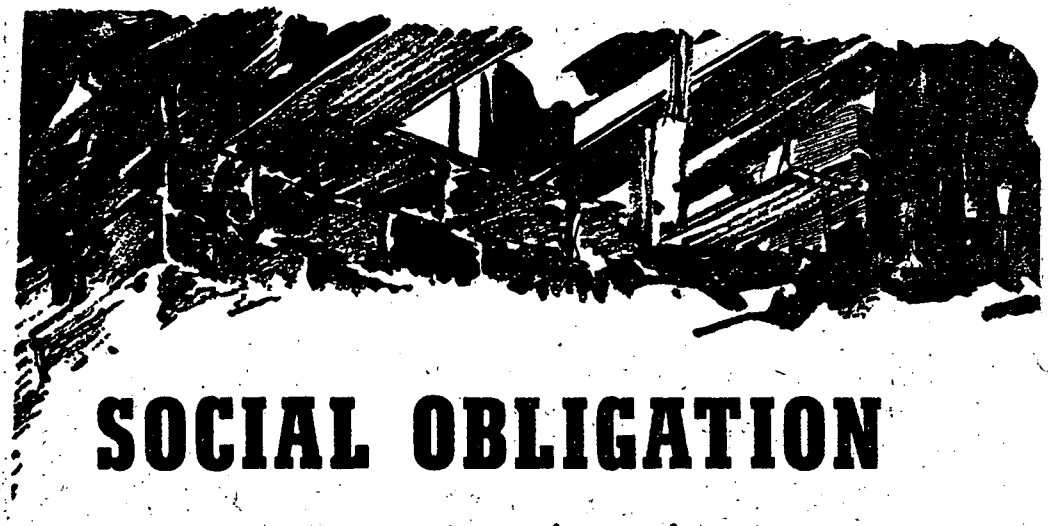

SOCIAL OBLIGATION

By Roy L. Clough, Jr.

Man has pioneered his way from the stone age to the atom bomb. Would there be a short cut for civilization on its next climb upward?

EVERY TIME he opened the door, he could see the ruins of the city in the distance, gaunt gray crumbling stones and twisted skeletal girders rusting away in the damp air, with fire-blackened ruins radiating in all directions.

He saw them this day, framing the head and shoulders of the man who had just knocked and who had had his hand raised to knock again when he opened the door. The hand came down, the man shifted uneasily, glanced around furtively, and smiled a little crookedly.

"Er, good afternoon, Lennie. Just a social call."

The man was breathing heavily from his trudge up the slope. The belly of his worn mackinaw pumped convulsively. His face was flushed, but when he spoke he tried to hold his voice even. He stepped inside as Lennie stepped back. Keen eyes in the florid face swept up the details of the shack. "Quite a layout you have here." He sat on the proffered chair and unbuttoned the top of his jacket. "That is, you might call it in the nature of a social call. We were afra—what I mean is, we heard about some of the things you were doing up here, and thought it would be sociable to come up and see how you were making out."

The young man addressed as "Lennie" studied the face of the caller, First Alderman Peters, for several seconds before he answered. All he said then was: "Oh, sure."

The alderman licked his lips nervously. He pointed to a crude handmade machine on the bench. "Is that dangerous?"

"Not particularly. It is a small dynamo."

"A what?"

"Dynamo." He gestured toward the

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Lennie hugged the crude, hand-made dynamo close to him, in defiance of the city fathers

city. "I found most of the stuff I needed out there."

"Out there?" There was a quaver in the alderman's voice. "I thought you knew out there is forbidden ground—ray poison in the dirt, in the bricks, in everything."

"I borrowed a Geiger box from the custodian," said Lennie. "I found a way into the ruins with very few clicks. I can show you. You must keep behind the highest piles of rubble in line-of-sight toward the center. I found a cellar-hole full of benches covered with things. Coils of wire, pieces of metal, even pots and pans—better than we make."

"What is this dimono supposed to do?"

"Dynamo. It makes something called electricity. I'll show you." The young man pointed to the back of the shack. "I have a paddlewheel set up in the stream behind this place...." He pulled a lever, a splashing whirr sounded outside. Inside, a shaft which ran above the bench started to turn. He took a short length of stick and flipped a belt over a crude pulley. The crude machine on the bench started to whine.

"I have been studying the old books," he explained. "It took me a long time to understand about this." He laid a hand on the crude generator. "But it works. There were a lot of words I didn't know. The pictures were the most help. It is nothing but some pieces of iron with wire wrapped around them. When it spins, the wires get all sort of tingly feeling. It will do a lot of things."

"Such as?"

Lennie picked up two wires dangling from the machine and poked them at a white glass globe lying on the bench.

A dazzling glare filled the room. The alderman gasped and averted his face. "Lord! What was that?"

"Electric light. Better than oil lamps, eh?"

"Shut it off."

He did so. The alderman frowned at the dynamo as its shaft slowed down and stopped. "The old legends say the bombs were as bright as the sun when they fell on the city."

"This has nothing to do with the bombs. I figure it that the light comes from a little piece of wire inside the glass."

"Oh?"

"In the same cellar-hole, I found a whole rack full of these globes, all different sizes. I was going to suggest to the council that they give me some help, and I'll build a bigger dynamo and light up the whole village at night."

"No. I'll speak for the council. The lamps we have are all right. The folk would not like something like this. It would seem funny that something just spinning could make light."

"It would be a big advantage."

"I doubt it. Oil lamps are enough. Night is the time for sleep. If better light kept the folk up, they wouldn't work as well in the fields next day. People need sleep."

First Alderman Peters waved a depreciating hand at the dynamo. "Why don't you forget this foolishness? It only makes the folks uneasy." His manner grew confidential: "And I'll tell you something for your own good. Lots of folks don't like it very much because you just putter around and take it easy, while they got to work hard to get by."

"Only stupid people would feel that way," Lennie bristled. "I more than pay my own way. How would you get your meat if it wasn't for my steel arrows?"

"I got it before you were born, young man," snapped the alderman, "and I reckon folks will hunt after you're dead. 'Course, I know you got

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a trick to making arrows and knives stay sharp, and you come along to be born just about the time the old stuff was wearing out. Just luck for you to hit the situation right."

"I worked hard to find out the secret, and I make fair trades," replied Lennie. "I only take as much food as it would take them time to make their own knives and arrows. If I have a way of doing it a bit faster than they do, it is because I worked and thought harder than they did."

"Well, a lot of folks think it ain't right just the same." The alderman shrugged. "Look, I'll make the offer again. Let me apportion you a piece of land—"

"No," the young man broke in. "I can do better going along as I am, experimenting, trying to improve things."

Alderman Peters studied him intently for a moment. "Aside from this thing you call a dynamo, what else have you been up to?"

"Studying, you might call it. Trying to piece together how things were before...."

"And how do you think they were?"

"Much better. More food for one thing, better food. People even had machines to carry them around on land, on water—even in the air."

"The air? Nonsense!"

"I don't think so. I have a book—part of a book—that shows pictures of several such machines."

"Rubbish. We have books in the village, too. One of them tells about an old woman riding on a bird Tales for children are not meant to be taken seriously."

"I think the book I have was meant to be taken seriously. It even shows people inside the air machines."

The alderman said nothing for quite a long time, then: "Did you ever hear of Jeff Thorpe?"

"I heard something when I was a little kid. Got killed in some kind of accident, didn't he?"

"He did. Only he made the accident, sort of. If he was alive now, he could talk to you better than I could. He found out that meddling with such things didn't pay."

"Oh?"

"Yes. He had a lot of ideas like you. But, at least, he worked in the fields alongside of everybody else, instead of taking advantage of a trick machine-thing to do his share." The alderman shook his head. "Jeff did his fooling around after hours. Well, I was a young man then myself, but I remember. He made a thing about so high," he indicated waist-level. "Power, he called it."

The younger man was keenly interested. "What was it supposed to do? How did it work?"

"I'm getting to that. He had a crazy idea that this thing he built could do more work than a man. It had a big wheel with a rod on it that slid a plug back and forth in a piece of smoothed-out pipe." The alderman grimaced wryly. "Funny idea he had. Thought he could run it on hog fat. We had hogs then, that was before the plague. He had a big can of the stuff melted with a candle under it —and this was supposed to run into the machine somehow—uphill mind you, through a little tube. Tsk! Well, he fooled around for a number of weeks with it. Every night, you could hear him spinning the wheel over by hand, trying to make it go by itself."

"Didn't it work?"

"One night, we heard a funny sound—like three or four quick claps of thunder, then a crash. We broke in. The whole top of the machine, the part made from pipe, was split open. Jeff was on the floor, a big chunk of iron in the side of his head, blood all over. He was gasping his last when we got to him."

"What happened to the machine?"

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"We smashed up what was left of it. I know, Lennie, you got a lot of ideas, and you been poking around a lot in the old books and think we are quite an ignorant bunch. But we knew —some of the old gents told us— there used to be machines with wheels on them that ran around and killed people. We didn't want that thing Jeff built chargin' through the village unexpected-like and hurting somebody."

Lennie said, "You got it all wrong."

"Oh, no, we ain't. And I want to tell you that thing you got there that makes the light is just as bad. Just suppose it got out into a wheat field during the dry season? Burn up everything, that's what."

Lennie looked at the dynamo. "You just don't understand."

The alderman nodded his head toward the ruined city. "We understand something like that."

"I don't propose to do anything like that."

The alderman made a gesture of dismissal. "We aren't going to worry any about you."

"That's funny, you rather gave me the impression you were worried."

"Did I?" The alderman got up. "Well, a man in my position gets to be worried an awful lot. I hope you understand, Lennie, difficult decisions—social obligations." He started for the door. "No, don't stop what you're doing; I'll let myself out." He opened the door, glanced out at the ruins, then into the faces of the tight-lipped semi-circle of men standing there.

"You were right—it is *science*." He hesitated, then: "Did you bring the *rope?*"

THE END

THE ELECTRONIC HOLE

By Leslie Phelps

TWO GADGETS, the transistor and the photo-transistor, have caused the investigation of a new concept in sub-atomic physics. The first device is a substitute for a vacuum tube, the second for a photo-electric cell. Neither device bears any resemblance to conventional electronic apparatus, yet performs the job as well. In fact, a whole new scientific field has opened up with the study of what are called "semi-conductors".

Some chemical elements, like germanium and carbon, are neither full electrical conductors nor full electrical insulators. Their behavior has always been puzzling and until now they haven't been fully harnessed. But with the invention of the transistor which is nothing but a speck of germanium crystal touched by thre pin-pointed wires and which acts just like a radio tube, semi-conductors have proven extremely useful.

In studying how these semi-conductors operate, scientists have stumbled on some new and radical concepts of the nature of electrons and other sub-atomic particles. For one thing, in a germanium crystal, the electron clearly behaves like a little packet of waves scattered by the heat and thermal agitation of the atoms. It has a charge of minus one of course and is the basic element of conduction. But equally important, and hitherto unsuspected, it has its counterpart, in a charge of plus one. This plus one charge is the opposite of an electron, but it is really a "hole in space", an absence of negative charge or electron. It is an anti-electron (not the same thing as a positron).

It makes itself felt as a positive electronic disturbance in the space of the atom, but it does not have the form of an electron. Physicists consider it essentially a hole in space which has the mobility of a particle! It is nothing—yet something! The whole picture is far from clear, since non-conductors and semi-conductors are not very well understood. But the plus one electron is very important in explaining the operation of transistors.

It might be added that transistors are replacing vacuum tubes in very many applications because they are small, require practically no power and are extremely reliable. The new science of semi-conductors will strongly influence our future gadgetry.

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STAR-SHOTS

By A. J. Kedzie

ASTRONOMY by no means is a static science! Something's always happening.

Proxima Centauri, the star nearest our Earth with the exception of the Sun (Proxima's distance is about four light years), behaves in a manner surprisingly similar to the Sun. It shoots out huge tongues of flame, doubling its brightness in a matter of less than an hour. Some four other stars do the same. Astronomers suspect that this phenomenon will provide important information and clues as to the nature of stellar evolution.

The government of India plans to take a strong interest in astronomy. This may seem surprising to some, but it shouldn't be, really, for India at present has some of the world's outstanding scientists. For example, the greatest methematician in the world (pure mathematician) is an Indian. In physics, particularly theoretical physics, spectroscopy, and similar abstruse subjects, India has a large number of men whose work is in the lead of the rest of the world. The astronomical interest includes a fascinating plan, to begin next year, for the creation of the world's highest astronomical observatory in the Himalayas, a matter of more than three miles above sea level! Anyone who is familiar with the improvement in "seeing" that high altitudes offer, will applaud this gesture. It means that scopes will reach out much more stably into space, without so much shimmering atmosphere above them.

The distance of Earth to Sun has also been much more accurately determined, an important matter, since that base-line is so often used in determining the distances of the nearer stars by parallax.

Electromagnetic radiations from more than fifty stars have been detected. These are chiefly in the centimeter wave-length region and promise to be an extremely important source of information in the future. The British and Australian astronomers who figuered largely in this important work are to be congratulated.

It is interesting also to note that this year of nineteen fifty marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the first astronomical photograph taken with a fifteen-inch reflector at the Harvard observatory, using a daguerrotype plate. How astronomical photography has advanced since then! Now it is the chief tool of the astronomer more important than any single item except the spectroscope and the telescope. The developement of increasingly fine-grained and sensative plates promises great advances also, particularly in the infra-red and the ultra-violet ranges of the spectrum.

From that list it's easy to see that astronomy isn't dead or even stagnant. While it's true that few people go into the field, only the top-notchers are necessary—and they're the ones who go. When that first observatory on the Moon gets started—just watch the interest in astronomy then!

ULTIMATE DEATH

By Pete Bagg

IT IS NO longer possible to use the word "impossible" as freely as has been done. Don't laugh at any tale you hear, no matter how fantastic it may be. If someone tells you the Moon is made of Swiss cheese and that the world is flat, believe them! Nothing is unbelievable any longer.

As much as it has been discussed, the destruction of the world by Man has generally been considered a purely academic problem—possible but highly improbable—"and okay for the science-fictionists to toy around with." Yes, sure the world can be destroyed theoretically by the hydrogen bomb, but...

There are no "buts"!

These startling conclusions are not typical scare-head atomic bomb chatter. No one is trying to throw the fear of God into anyone else. No one is just talking or bragging. The facts confront us, that's all.

Numerous atomic physicists have said that the Earth could be rendered uninhabitable through the radioactive dust thrown out by a super hydrogen bomb. But they didn't back it with figures. Many of us agreed with that conclusion, but didn't get alarmed.

But we can't shut our eyes any longer. A young physicist at the University of Chicago has finally sat down and with log tables and handbooks, figured exactly what would do the job! His results show beyond the shadow of a doubt (as the lawyers say) that Man carries within himself the seeds of his own destruction.

The super atomic bomb (a hydrogen job, of course) would have to be about two or three times the weight of the battle ship *Missouri*. It would have a cobalt shell weighing from ten to a hundred thousand pounds. And it would cost (the heavy hydrogen alone) as much as the Manhattan bomb project.

When and if such a bomb were detonated, it would scatter sufficient radioactive dust to be carried and diffused through the entire atmosphere, killing everything within range—that is everywhere! Such a fantastically huge bomb is within the realm of feasibility and could be constructed with known techniques by a few of the modern industrialized nations on the Earth. No living thing would endure.

The hydrogen transformation has not (to our knowledge) been worked yet, and feebly some physicists hope and pray that it won't. They know however intuitively that it will. The cobalt-hydrogen bomb is the suicide weapon of the Earth.

Arnold, the physicist who calculated these observations, makes it clear that the products of the fission would contaminate every single nook and cranny of this beaten planet. The bomb would be a pure suicide weapon with no one immune to its lethal effects. And that is the story.

It sounds like something from a science-fictionist's pen—but it isn't. It's cold clear fact. "...Oh brave new world, that hath such goodly creatures in't..."

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The MASTER EGO

By Peter Worth

It was after Stan killed himself that he really started to live!

"YOU WILL come with us," he said.

Stan Oliver looked down from his six foot two inches, with slightly incredulous amusement at the serious, slowly blinking eyes. The resonant deep voice of the speaker, and his grave dignity, were in amusing contrast to his less than two and a half feet of stature.

"What is this?" Stan asked, surveying the ring of little men that were surrounding him at a discrete distance. "A kidnapping?"

"No," the spokesman said. "You have been chosen for the supremely important task."

The ring of little men moved slightly in a coaxing attempt to get Stan walking. He stood still.

"Mind telling me what it's about?" he said. "After all, it isn't reasonable for a dozen fellows like you to suddenly appear out of the brush, surround a citizen and get him to walk off with—"

"Orders," the spokesman interrupted. "Our orders are to bring you."

Stan's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Say," he said, "I read somewhere that the flying saucers had little men like you on them. You aren't from a flying saucer, are you?"

"Flying saucers?" The spokesman blinked. "Yes, I believe you Earth people call them that."

"Sorry," Stan murmured, then, as a laughing thought struck him: "I never ride in saucers. I have to have my coffee—and they don't serve coffee in saucers."

"We will get some," the spokesman said. "We have orders to make sure you are not deprived of the things for which you've formed a habit."

"No sense of humor," Stan said to himself. But there was a hint of uneasiness in his eyes. He looked at the ring of little people around him, and estimated his chances of making a break for it. Out here in the Olympic wilderness west of Puget Sound, there would be little chance of finding help in a fight.

"How far is your flying saucer from here?" he asked.

"A mile," the spokesman told him in his deep voice. "You will come." It wasn't a question. "We will go to your camp and get you some coffee. All you have."

Stan came to a sudden decision. "No," he said firmly. "I will not come. Go away and leave me alone, or you'll get hurt."

Without waiting for their reaction, he strode forward in the direction he had been going before they surrounded him.

The little men in his way stood their ground, while the others ran ahead to stand behind them, presenting a three layer depth of little bodies.

Stan paused. "I could walk right through you guys," he said mildly.

"You will come with us," the spokes-

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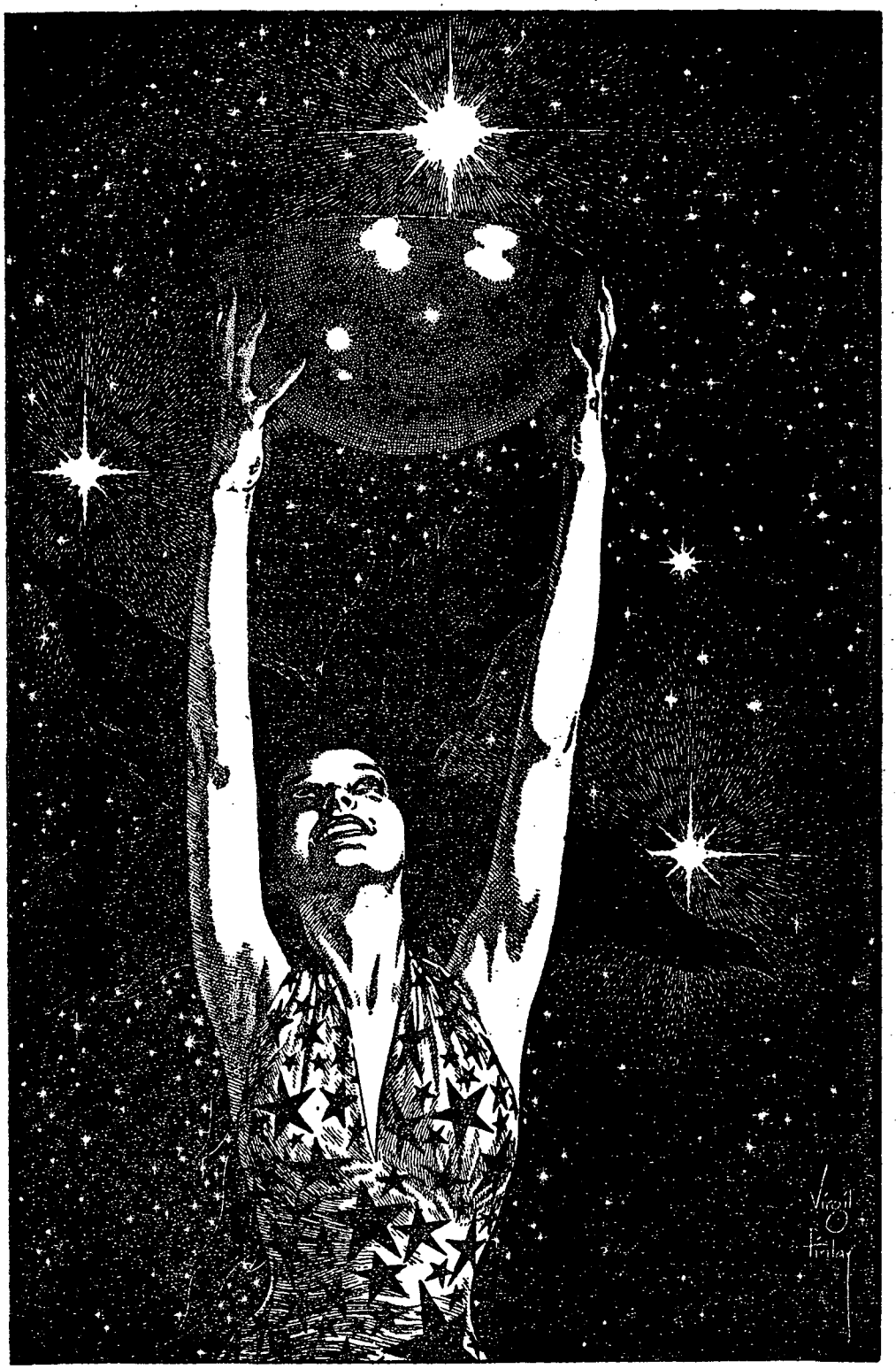

Fay coaxed the ball of radiance directly over the hollow of the bowl she was holding

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man was insisting. "Orders."

"Nuts to you." Stan started toward them. His foot and knee caught one and sent him staggering back into his fellows. "Out of the way," Stand said. He took another step, colliding with two more of them. His knees were even with their necks. It was like push-through a crowd of little boys.

THEY STOOD their ground, letting him push them out of the way without fighting back. As soon as he had gone through their ranks, they ran past him and reformed.

He strode through them again, this time taking less care not to hurt them. Two went down, felled by light blows from his knees as they jarred against diminutive jaws.

"You'll make me mad," Stan said.

They ran ahead and formed in front of him for the third time. They showed no anger, nor any intention of trying to fight him.

"You will come with us," the spokesman said in his soft bellow, as though nothing had happened since he had said it last.

"I will not," Stan said firmly. "If you give me one good reason for going, I'll consider it. But I'm not going to follow a bunch of passive resistancers just to keep from stepping on their feet. Now, get out of my way before I get tough."

He started forward again. This time, they parted ranks and let him through. But after a few seconds, they scurried past him to form their barricade again.

"What is it this time?" he asked.

"We have decided to tell you our orders are to take you to the supreme Focus."

"No," Stan said. "Tell the supreme Focus, whatever that may be, that my orders are for it to come to me."

"Those are orders?" the spokesman asked.

"Orders," Stan said gravely. His eyes twinkled. He was beginning to get a kick out of these little people, he decided.

They stood silently as though in thought for a moment. Suddenly, the spokesman said, "Very well."

The little people turned and went into the bushes lining the path. They moved rapidly and were quickly out of sight. Stan watched them go, surprised at their unexpected reaction.

"I guess 'orders' is the key word with them," he mumbled. "Funny little runts."

Abruptly, he decided to be smart. Abandon his idea of hiking up the side of the mountain. Go back to camp and load up the car and get out.

"I've had enough of this mosquito country anyway," he said. "I'm starting to talk to myself. A week out here is long enough."

He hurried back along the trail, his mind on thoughts of how to kill the remaining week of his vacation. The trail led to a clearing of perhaps an acre where there was little more than a scabrock. He was half way across when he heard the swishing sound overhead.

He looked up. Coasting along toward the west, less than five hundred feet off the ground, was a flying saucer. It was round. There was a narrow rim that ran around it. It was silver in color like the metal skin of a plane. About half of its underbelly was a soft golden color, like a hotplate. Luminous. There was a similar luminous band along the rim at the stern in its flight. It was picking up speed rapidly.

By the time it had become hidden behind the tree tops to the west, it was going very fast. It had been forty to fifty feet in diameter.

"I'll be darned," Stan Oliver said softly. He gave a snorting laugh. "I forgot to tell them I don't believe in

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saucers," he added, a note of wistfulness in his voice.

It was a good two miles back to where he had pitched his tent beside his car in a clear area beside the narrow dirt road. By the time he had reached it, he decided that his vacation had been ruined.

"In fact," he said aloud wearily as he gathered sticks to build up the fire so he could cook his evening meal several hours later, "maybe my whole life has been ruined. I'll always wish I had gone with those kid-size men with their frog voices."

As he finished saying this, a melodious laugh sounded behind him. He straightened up, spilling the pile of sticks in his arm, and turned.

Standing several feet away was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"HELLO!" STAN said pleasantly, sizing her up.

She was perhaps five feet seven. Her hair was a shining black, her skin a delicate shade of tan. She was not dressed for walking in the hinterlands of the Olympic Peninsula. Her sleeveless, V-neck dress was of a slinky material, pale blue, studded with five-pointed stars of varying sizes. It ended half way below her knees, just above a pair of high topped boots that seemed made of woven metal. Her lips, smiling broadly, were a satiny red, revealing even white teeth. The eyes above the smooth contours of her cheeks were a scintillating blue.

Stan took a long deep breath. "What happened?" he asked. "Car break down?"

"No," she said softly "I have no car."

"Don't tell me you're off a flying saucer," he joked.

'Yes," she said. "I've come to talk to you."

"They should have sent you the first time instead of those little guys."

"Yes," she said.

Stan suddenly became aware of the solitude around him and this girl, the immense forest wilderness with snow capped mountains to the north and the east. He became acutely and uncomfortably conscious of the fact that he and this girl were alone.

Or were they?

"Are you alone?" he asked abruptly.

"No," she said, the smile never leaving her lips. "I am the Focus."

"Oh...yeah..." Stan said. "They told me about that. Said they'd get you. How'd you get here so soon?"

He glanced at the setting sun, and stooped to pick up the sticks he had dropped. His inner uncomfortableness was growing. He kept his eyes on her as much as he could. The way she stood quietly smiling, the way she answered in monosyllables, made him feel that something was wrong.

He looked up at her again. Now she had stooped down and was picking up sticks. The strangeness that had been an aura about her was gone. She darted him a friendly grin, and went on picking up sticks and piling them on one arm as he was doing

"That's the girl," he said approvingly. "We'll get the fire going and have something to eat."

"Fine," she agreed.

He studied her covertly while they gathered sticks, his curiosity growing. "My name's Stanley Oliver," he said suddenly. "What's yours?"

"I am the Focus," she said.

"Nuts," Stan snorted. "Don't give me that. You must have a name. What is it? Jane? Mary?"

She picked up some more sticks, her lips pouting in thought. "You are Stanley Oliver?" she asked slowly. She seemed to be struggling with a whole new concept.

"Yes, but what is your name?"

She frowned, as though wrestling with an idea she couldn't grasp. The

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frown vanished and the smile came on. "I am the Focus," she said.

STAN STOOD up, looking at her with exasperation. Suddenly, he laughed. "OK, you're the Focus," he said. "But that isn't a name. I'll call you Jane—no, I think I'll call you Fay." He grinned. "That fits you better." She stood up, her arm loaded with wood, and smiled. "Come on, Fay, let's take the wood over to the fire."

She walked beside him, her long limbs taking strides equal to his own under the yielding fabric of her dress. When he dropped his load of wood on the depleted stock already on hand, she waited until he had stepped back and did the same.

He watched her, getting the impression that she didn't have the slightest idea what it was all about, but was merely imitating his actions to be companionable.

He unfolded a camp stool and set it down. "Sit here," he said. "We can talk while I start supper. I hope you like the same food I do."

She continued smiling while she sat down. Cupping her knees in her hands, she watched while he put wood on the fire and fanned it into a blaze.

"You know," he said, bringing some potatoes out of a sack and starting to peel them, "I get the impression that having a name is something new to you. I gather that you aren't from the Earth. That you're from some other planet or something. Things are probably different where you come from; but how do you get along without names?"

"I know what you mean," she said. "Individuals have names. But you see I am not one individual. I am the Focus."

Stan let the feeling that was growing in him about this girl show in his eyes for a moment. Slowly, a blush appeared under her tan.

"The heck you aren't an individual," he said.

Abruptly, he dropped the knife and the potato he was peeling and went over to her. He put his arms around her and drew her to her feet, pressing her against him.

He looked into her eyes for a long moment, then kissed her, feeling the rapid rise and fall of her breast against him. When her lips didn't respond, he kissed her more fiercely. And suddenly, her lips were responding.

"No," she murmured. She struggled feebly. "No," her hands were against his shoulders now, pushing strongly.

He let her go and stood still, quietly smiling, as she stepped back and regarded him strangely, her hair in disarray, breathing heavily.

Suddenly, Stan started laughing. She continued to look at him, her breathing becoming more regular. She wasn't smiling. She wasn't afraid. Stan couldn't classify her expression. He stopped laughing and went back to the potatoes.

When he continued to ignore her, the girl went back to the camp stool and sat down, her deep blue eyes regarding him intently.

SHE ATE. Stan had the feeling that she ate his food like he might eat baked birdsnests or some other strange food in a foreign country. If she disliked the baked trout or the boiled potatoes, she didn't show it. She ate as she had picked up the wood, following his lead, apparently doing things only because he was doing them, with no motive other than sociability.

When they finished, Stan said, "All right, we've finished eating," and felt like he had said, "All right, we've shaken hands." He shrugged off the feeling. "Now," he said firmly, "what's this all about? Some little men try to get me to go riding in a flying sau-

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cer. When I refuse, they try to knock themselves out against my knees, so I'll feel sorry for them and go with them. When I order them to bring this—you, I guess—here, they fly away. A few hours later, you show up. Suppose you start talking now." He grinned. "Personally, I'd just as soon not talk." He half rose as though about to put his arms around her again.

He paused, having intended his move only as a threat. She made no motion of fear or alarm. Her eyes fixed on him in fascination. The playful smile on his lips vanished. He stood up and bent down.

When she still made no motion to prevent him, he put his arms around her and drew her up to her feet, kissing her. Her lips responded. Her bare arms slowly encircled his neck.

Like a slap, the realization came to him that she was studying her reactions and feelings. He released her and stepped back, angry. "All right!" he began. But her eyes were on him, unblinking, her features relaxed. He felt again like he was standing in the presence of something totally foreign to his knowledge. Defenseless in an undefinable way.

He sat down on the ground. When she had resumed her seat on the camp stool, he said, "How about telling me what this is all about? In other words, do some talking. Talk about anything, if you want to. The moon, the price of corn flakes in Nova Scotia, your home town back where you came from. Anything."

The silence lengthened. Stan took out his pipe and methodically filled and lit it, puffing slowly and looking up at the clear blue sky with its stars, ignoring the darkness beyond the rays of the campfire and the girl.

"It's extremely difficult for me to converse with you on any level," she finally said, breaking the silence with her smooth melodious voice. And Stan gained the impression that by the word converse she included embracing and kissing. "It would facilitate matters if you would come with me. You can be back within twenty-four hours, and continue your vacation undisturbed."

"Why do you want me to go with you?" Stan asked. "Why don't you just stay with me? That'd be simpler." He grinned behind his pipe at the dull flush that spread over her features and died away.

"Because the ins—the devices cannot be safely worked in the Earth's atmosphere," she replied.

"You were going to say instruments." Stan said. He thought a minute. "So you want to take me out above the atmosphere into space," he said slowly. "Where's your flying saucer? Not far from here? Does it have a crew of the little men?"

"The flying saucer is half a mile from here," she said. "There is no crew."

"What!" Stan exclaimed in mock surprise. "You must be mighty brave to come all the way out here alone to visit a strange man.

"I am the Focus," she said simply.

"You sound like that's the answer to all the sixty-four dollar questions," Stan said. "Maybe I'll go with you." He looked levelly into her eyes. She began to blush again. "I think I'll go with you," he said hesitantly, "if you'll kiss me and not try to analyze your reactions while you're doing it, Fay. Mind if I call you Fay?"

"Not at all," she said politely. She half held out her arms.

Stan got quickly to his feet and wrapped her in his arms, looking down at her upturned face. "Hey!" he said gently. "You close your eyes just like any other woman!"

Her eyes remained closed as she smiled.

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THE FLYING saucer rested on the ground in a small clearing. Stan played his flashlight on it and found that it didn't quite rest on the ground. There were blunt stumps protruding from the underside that held it clear. A set of metal steps led up from the ground to the topside.

Fay indicated he should precede her. He took the steps two at a time. When Fay joined him, the steps slowly swung upward, collapsing as they swung, until they came down and rested in the skin of the ship, presenting a smooth surface.

A shallow broad dome in the center of the upper surface was their goal. Its surface was unbroken metal. No windows. Fay went to a certain spot and pressed against the surface. Part of the dome swung out.

Stan shot his flashlight through the opening. The interior seemed more a living room than a pilot room of a ship. Fay entered and went toward a crackle-finished cabinet. Stan followed and turned to see the opening closing again.

"How do you see to fly in this thing?" he asked.

Six small screens along the top of the panel came to life, revealing the familiar forest in four of them, the sky in a fifth, and a small section of grassy ground in the sixth.

"At the speeds we go, windows are impractical," Fay said. She motioned to a seat. "Sit down and fasten the straps."

She waited until he had done so, then sat in another and strapped herself in. She turned her head to smile at him. Her finger pressed down on a bright red pin on the arm of her seat.

Nothing happened for a moment. Then, abruptly, Stan felt as though he were rising straight upward in the fastest elevator ever built. As quickly as this sensation came, it was gone, and Stan felt himself pressed backward against his chair. The pressure became steady. He looked up at the six screens.

The one that had shown the ground, now showed a large area of the Olympics with a growing section of ocean. In seconds, the land was gone.

One of the screens for horizontal view began to grow bright. Slowly, the sun rose into it. The sun that had set two hours before! It swung to one side of the screen, passed out of view, entered a second screen and passed through it to enter a third screen. There had been a slight side force indicating a broad turn eastward.

The sun remained just above the ocean horizon, while the horizon slowly curved. Stan recalled the curve of the horizon in pictures taken from the rockets at White Sands as they rose to great heights. He looked over at Fay. She was watching the screens intently. Half an hour passed. In the downward screen, the dark side of the Earth began to assume the proportions of a globe.

STAN THOUGHT of airline trips he had made. This was being done in the same smooth way. Unspectacular. He was now higher than any man had ever been, and it was no thrill.

Fay unfastened her straps and got up. Stan started to do the same.

"No," she said quickly. "Stay as you are. It's too risky." He relaxed and watched her. She went to one of the cabinets and opened its top, bending over. When she straightened up, she was carrying a cup in a saucer. She brought it over to him and held it out.

"Your coffee," she offered.

"Huh?" Stan said. Sudden comprehension struck him. He started to laugh, but choked it back. "No sense of humor," he thought. "Thanks," he said seriously. It was good coffee.

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Too good. It was synthetic.

Fay was fastening her seat straps again. Stan saw her glance toward the center screen. He followed her gaze, and saw a glistening half moon in the middle of the screen.

While he sipped his coffee slowly, the half moon grew, until it was obvious that it was some sort of ship.

"That's our destination?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Mind telling me what it's all about now?"

"There is nothing I could tell," she said. "You will see and hear and feel."

"Tell me this then. Why am I being brought here? I take it I'm to be set back on Earth again right away. Am I being brought up here to see something to tell the world about?"

He watched while she appeared to think this over. "You are being brought here because the world is mentally ill," she said. "I have studied it."

"What's that got to do with me?"

She thought this over for several minutes while the globular space ship in the center screen grew to vaster proportions than the earth itself. "There's no way I can answer your question," she said. "You can't understand yet. Wait. You will see."

STAN SAW that the huge sphere of the ship they were nearing was rotating noticeably. He had caught on to directions relative to screen position now, and was able to interpret ship motion. The flying saucer was taking a circular orbit in the direction of rotation of the mother ship, and drawing closer; and unless the saucer turned over, it would land upside down on the equator of the sphere.

At the last minute, he saw a circular indentation in the now almost flattened expanse of the surface of the sphere. Then, the saucer had settled into it, smoothly and silently.

Fay smiled at him and nodded, starting to unfasten her seat belts. Stan quickly followed suit. He realized now why the ship had landed upside down. The centrifugal force of the mother ship's rotation provided normal weight in the right direction.

Fay went to the panel and pressed a blue stud. A section of the circular wall swung slowly back.

Stan saw several of the little men beyond the door. They seemed to be the ones he had encountered on the trail that morning.

He felt a hand touch his. He looked sideways. Fay smiled and led him toward the entrance into the big ship.

"You will not need to ask questions," she said. "Just watch and listen—and eventually you will know that which you can't as yet understand."

"OK, Fay," Stan said. "But I want to warn you that I'm not letting you out of my sight. Not for a minute." He took her by the shoulders gravely. "Do you understand? You're not to leave me."

He let go of her, feeling somehow frustrated. She had smiled and said she would stay with him, but it had seemed to mean something different than he had expected it to.

There were more of the little men as he and Fay stepped into the big ship. Fay led him to an elevator. Three of the little men jumped past them to get into the elevator before they did. Then, when Stan and Fay were in, they squeezed past them and got out. The elevator doors started to close automatically. Half way, they paused, and swung open to let two different little men in.

"They have a hard time making up their minds," Stan said to Fay. He looked at her and smiled.

The smile slowly faded as he continued looking at her. Her eyes were

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large and round, her satin lips parted. He forgot the presence of the two little men and pulled her close.

He became aware that something was tugging at him. He looked down. One of the two little men was pulling at his clothes. Stan frowned at him, then released Fay.

She stood as though waiting for him to kiss her again. He looked away from her uncomfortably, a feeling growing within him that there was something wrong somewhere, a feeling that almost amounted to guilt.

THE ELEVATOR came to a stop. The doors opened. Outside was a crowd of the little men. Stan grinned at them as he followed Fay out, then turned to watch as they ignored him and piled into the elevator.

"We have only a short way to go now," Fay said.

Stan looked down at the two little men who were siding him now. They weren't the same two that had come up with them on the elevator. Even as he watched, one of the two scurried back the way they had come, passing another of the little men who hurried up to replace him.

Stan glanced down each side passage they came to. Ahead was a closed door. Fay went to this door. It opened. They stepped through into a vast space. The door swung closed behind them.

Stan closed his eyes and shook his head, then opened them again. It was like being a quarter of an inch high and standing inside a radio set, he thought. A radio set such as no one had ever seen before.

Giant quartz tubes towered like futuristic buildings, their insides intricate mazes of plates and coils and wires, with here and there a glowing filament. Huge squat structures dotted the floor, looking like a cross between a warehouse building and a radio transformer. Thick rods went everywhere in straight lines and gracefully curved right angle bends, obviously leads from one electrical unit to another, but looking more like the foot thick high pressure piping in a steam plant.

There were other things. Things he couldn't classify.

And everywhere were the little men, scurrying around, cleaning, polishing, or just running about doing nothing. None of them seemed to be aware of his presence.

Fay led the way among the gigantic electrical units to a metal stairway that spiraled upward. He followed her along a narrow catwalk onto a giant structure that looked like an oil storage tank, a squat upright cylinder a hundred yards across and twenty feet high.

It was one of three similar units, each pair touching so that they formed a triangle.

FAY LED the way to the central space they enclosed, and went down a narrow stairway, looking back to make sure he was following.

Below was a floor formed by the three concave arcs of the cylinders. Coming out from the sides of the cylinders were box-like affairs.

Stan saw now that the three squat cylinders were more probably giant cyclotrons of some kind, and the box-like things were probably where the particles were shot out.

They reached the floor. For the first time since they had entered the giant space ship, he was alone with Fay. But now, she paid no attention to him. She went directly to a small cylindrical affair in the exact center of the floor. Stooping down beside it, she pulled up a lid that set flush in the floor and brought out a hollow hemisphere. A bowl. Its outer and inner surfaces seemed to be made of

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gold. Its lip was glistening black.

With this in her hands, she stepped to the disk-like top of the small cylinder. Immediately, it started to rise. It went up until Fay was just below the square openings of the box-like structures that came out from the three giant cylinders.

At the same time, Stan became aware of a low rumbling that seemed to come from the floor and the atmosphere around him. It grew more pronounced, settling into an even vibration.

But now, a strange sensation was creeping over him. His skin prickled. He held up a hand and looked at it. The hair on its back was raised. Minute tendrils of blue fire escaped from hair ends.

He looked up at Fay and gasped in surprise. Her long black hair was no longer hanging over her shoulder. It had risen and was trying to separate into single strands.

"God! The electric charge here must be in the millions of volts!" Stan gasped.

He watched Fay, fascinated. She was holding the bowl over her head as far as she could reach, as though to catch something in it.

And from the three box-like affairs, three fine lines of blue brilliance converged at a single point directly over the bowl.

"Good God!" Stan thought in alarm. "Doesn't she know she's monkeying with forces that could annihilate her?" He took a step forward, then stopped, feeling foolish. Momentarily, he had forgotten that she belonged here, and knew more about what she was doing than he did.

SUDDENLY, there was a blinding flash at the point of convergence of the three blue rays from the cyclotrons. It wavered, then held.

Fay lifted on tiptoe and held the bowl directly under it, with a slow up and down motion. The ball of white brilliance began to move along with it, and suddenly broke away from its three-pronged anchor. But immediately afterwards it floated upward.

Stan saw disappointment on Fay's face. She waited. Another ball of white light came into being at the point of convergence of the three blue pencils of energy. Again Fay coaxed it free. Again it escaped her.

One after another of the balls of radiance came into being, to escape and hover in the air as though watching the silent drama. But finally one held. It hovered directly over the hollow of the bowl.

Stan began to realize that the bowl must be some sort of trap for the balls of light. Probably an insulating material, with an outer and inner sheet of gold or other metal, to form a static field of force that could hold the ball of light created by the energy from the three cyclotrons.

"This is science far beyond anything Earth ever had!" he thought wonderingly.

Now, the cylinder Fay was standing on lowered until it was in its former position. She stepped off, still holding the bowl over her head with its captive ball of radiance.

She came toward him, her eyes looking into his and filled with blue fires. He watched her as though hypnotized. He half guessed something was going to happen to him. He wanted to turn and escape. His feet felt rooted to the floor.

He saw the gold bowl with its glistening black rim slowly turn over, manipulated by her fingers, the ball of brilliance staying in place above the hollow.

He saw her arms come toward him as she paused two feet away from him.

Suddenly, tingling fire bathed the top of his head, flowed inward, and

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coursed in one awful second through every cell of his body. He felt as though he were expanding in size at the speed of light, then contracting. He felt sensations that his mind couldn't grasp.

And then Fay was standing before him, the bowl hanging at her side in one hand, a perfectly normal smile on her lips.

"There!" she said, and she said it like a woman who had just completed the last stitch on a sweater she had been knitting.

HE BECAME aware of the diminutive men tugging at him, coaxing him to climb, guiding his feet, scurrying around him busily like aimless ants. In a moment of hyperclarity, he watched one of the balls of radiance drift against the metal floor and seem to be sucked into it like ink into a blotter.

Then, there were long periods of unconsciousness. He would snap out of them into a half-wakeful state, then fall back into unawareness.

He closed his eyes once for what he thought was a fraction of a second. When they opened, he was strapped into his chair in the flying saucer. Fay was in the other. There were none of the little men in sight.

With great effort, he focussed his eyes on the six screens, but could make no sense out of what he saw. He closed his eyes again.

"Can you unfasten your straps?" he heard Fay asking him.

"Sure," he mumbled. He tried. Fay watched his fumbling attempts and pushed his hands away, unbuckling the straps herself. He watched her, a suspicious frown on his face.

When he stood up, he wrapped his fingers around her wrist. "You're staying with me, Fay," he said. "I know what you're thinking. You're thinking you can get me off the ship and then scram. Well, you'd better think again. You're staying with me.

Her laugh was musical, sympathetic, almost sad.

He jerked her against him and clamped her close with his arms. "Kiss me," he ordered. But when she obediently raised her lips, he pushed her away. "I'm drunk," he muttered. "But how did I get drunk? I didn't have a drink."

"I tried to give you your coffee," Fay said.

"To hell with coffee," Stan said angrily. Then, he thought a minute and chuckled. "No sense of humor." He grinned at her. "Kiss me," he ordered. She obediently went into his arms and kissed him.

Later, he lost consciousness again. The next he knew, Fay was carefully guiding him down the steps from the flying saucer to the ground. He seized her wrist again and gripped it tight.

"No running out on me," he said. When Fay smiled at him, he frowned belligerently at her.

On the ground, he stumbled forward, pulling her along with him. It was daylight.

THE SMELL of damp grass was in his nostrils. He lay quiet, trying to get things straight in his mind. Experimentally, he opened his eyes. Blades of grass were in the foreground of his view, blurred by being too close to his eyes. He became aware he was lying on the ground.

He propped himself up on his hands and looked around. He was alone. He was within sight of his car and his tent.

Memory came back to him in a flood.

"Fay!" he shouted. "Fay!"

But even as he called, he knew it was no use. She had brought him this

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far, then gone back to her flying saucer. He had leaped to his feet as he called. Now, he stood there, not calling, tears forcing themselves from his eyes to coast down and dampen his cheeks.

Slowly, he turned to the west and raised his head, looking up into the blue sky with its widely spaced white billows of clouds. For a long time, he stared at the empty sky. When he lowered his head and started toward camp, his face was etched with bitterness.

"WHAT HAPPENED to you on your vacation, Stan?"

Stanley Oliver looked up from the thick book spread open on his desk. "Huh?" he said vaguely. "Oh. Nothing. Why?"

"I don't know," Bill Freemont shrugged. "You've been moping around as if you'd been jilted at the door of the church. But that isn't all of it, either. You're different."

"Different? How?"

"What are you working on?" Bill changed the subject abruptly.

"Trying to straighten out the tax muddle Bulfinch and Healy foisted on me," Stan said. He took out his pipe absently, looked at it thoughtfully, then put it back in his pocket.

"Sweet racket they've got," Bill observed. "They get the big law accounts and sublet the work to us at fifteen dollars an hour. Bet they don't do anything but play golf."

"I've about come to the same conclusion," Stan agreed. "In fact—"

He pressed the white button on his desk. A moment later, his secretary walked in.

"Take a letter to B and H," Stan said. He watched while she seated herself sexlessly. "Dear sirs," he began. "In reference to account code number a46, the difficulty can be straightened out, but not under the current agreement. Ethical considerations prevent me from advising the clients directly. Therefore, I am cancelling our present arrangements on all accounts. At any time clients care to consult me directly, I will be pleased to tend to their legal matters. Sincerely, etcetera. And insert an up-to-date bill with it, Gertrude."

"Yes sir, Mr. Oliver," she said. She glanced at Bill who was slouched on the corner of the desk, cigarette dangling from his lips. "And I'm glad you've made this decision. You were developing into a law clerk, the way things were going. You're too big for that."

"There you are!" Bill said as the girl left the room. "Confirmation of what I said."

"Nuts," Stan protested. "I've been thinking of doing that for a long time. I just decided, that's all."

The phone rang. Stan scooped it up. "Yes?" he said.

"Mister Bulfinch wishes to talk to you, Mr. Oliver," Gertrude's voice sounded clearly.

"Bulfinch himself!" Bill formed the words with his lips.

"Put him on," Stan said. "Hello, Mr. Bulfinch?"

"Hello, Stanley, my boy," a careful voice sounded. "I've been intending to call you for a long time. Uh, how's the a46 account coming?"

"My secretary is typing a letter to you right now on it," Stan said.

"Uh, fine. Fine," Bulfinch said. "However, that isn't what I called about. I'm having a little party this evening at my home. Not many there. Just a few. Senator Blake, Governor Thomas, Judge Stevens—and their wives, of course. Are you married? No? A young lady perhaps? No? Well, my daughter Fay won't object to your coming alone, I believe. I think she's seen you, from what she said recently. I'll see you at eight. Call for you

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myself." There was a distinct click at the other end.

Stan slowly lowered the phone and stared at it, his eyes large and round.

"Seen a ghost?" Bill asked.

"I don't know," Stan said, placing the phone in its cradle. "Probably not." He reached toward the white button.

Bill reached out and seized his wrist. "Uh-uh," he said. "Don't cancel that letter to Bulfinch. You've made the decision. Stick to it." He studied Stan as the hand was slowly withdrawn. "You have seen a ghost, haven't you?" he added thoughtfully.

STAN FELT his heart pounding painfully against his ribs as he caught sight of a second person in the car beside the familiar one of Mr. Bulfinch. A young lady, apparently, though the lights against the glass of the car made even that uncertain.

The car stopped at the curb. The rear door was opened from inside. Fixing a smile on his face to hide his emotions, Stan bent down and slid into the car, dropping beside the young lady. He had taken one swift look at her as he sat down, then closed the door with his face turned away to hide his disappointment. It hadn't been the Fay, of course. He hadn't expected it to be, really.

The limousine slid smoothly into traffic. Stan turned to shake hands with Mr. Bulfinch and be introduced to his daughter.

"My daughter Fay, Stan," Mr. Bulfinch said warmly. Too warmly, Stan thought.

"Hello, Fay," Stan said. He dared to look closely at her features now as he took her hand briefly.

"Hello, Stan," she said. "I've been very curious about you." She smiled. For an instant, Stan felt that it was the girl of the Olympic Peninsula who was looking out of her eyes. The feeling faded, and the commonplace returned.

"Why have you been curious about me?" he asked, settling back.

"Never ask a woman questions, Stan," Mr. Bulfinch chuckled.

"Dad is trying to change the subject," Fay said. "He doesn't want me to tell you that for some reason he's eaten, slept, and talked Stan Oliver for the last week. Naturally, it made me curious."

"Now, I'm curious." Stan looked at Mr. Bulfinch. "Why the sudden interest in me?"

"I can see you don't know Dad too well," Fay said. "Anyone he takes a sudden interest in fits in with some scheme he's cooked up. Don't be alarmed, though. The worst that can happen to you, if he has a scheme up his sleeve, is that you'll wind up as district attorney or governor or something."

"Oh," Stan said. "I see. Then maybe I'd better tell you the contents of that letter on account number a46, Mr. Bulfinch. The letter tells you I resign."

"I've been expecting it, my boy," Mr. Bulfinch said. "I would have done the same thing in your place long ago. A man shouldn't stay in a rut until it gets over his head so he can't see out of it."

"Well," Stan said, "I feel better. I was feeling a little guilty about accepting your hospitality."

He turned to study Fay with open frankness. Her face did resemble that of the girl who had called herself the Focus. But here there was no impression of something different, something strange. There was only healthy outlook, frank interest, alert intelligence.

"Over the phone, your dad said something about you having seen me s o m e w h e r e," he said suddenly. "Where? I don't remember ever having seen you before, Fay."

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SHE DARTED Mr. Bulfinch an accusing look. Then, she chuckled good naturedly. "I got Bill Freemont to point you out to me in the coffee shop of your building yesterday," she confessed.

"Bill?" Stan said. "Why that so-and-so! He never told me. Wait till I get my hands on him."

The chauffeur turned the limousine into a broad driveway. Stan looked curiously up the winding parkway at the approach to the Bulfinch mansion. He had seen pictures of it in the Sunday supplements, but had never dreamed he would ever be invited here.

A man in the uniform of the police was running toward the car waving his arms. The chauffeur looked back at Mr. Bulfinch for orders.

"Better stop and see what he wants," Mr. Bulfinch said. The car came to a smooth stop as the policeman came up. "Better wait here," he said, panting. "There's an escaped lunatic. He was seen and chased. He's somewhere here on this property."

"Then the thing for us to do is go to the house and lock all the doors," Mr. Bulfinch said, putting authority into his voice.

A shot sounded through the trees.

"They must have got him," the policeman said. "I'll ride with you to the house just to play safe, sir."

He got in beside the chauffeur. The car continued on until it had stopped beside a door leading into the large mansion.

Stan opened his door at the same time the policeman opened his. They got out together. Stan turned to assist Fay.

He sensed a movement behind him at the same time his ears caught the violent rattle of the bushes that lined the driveway here. Before he could move, something had landed on him. He felt himself hurled to the ground. Fingers circled his neck. He saw contorted features and blazing eyes staring down at him as he tried to free the choking fingers.

There was a blur of movement behind the face. A surprised expression came into it. The glaring eyes rolled upward, leaving only whites as the man fell forward.

STAN ROSE painfully, helped by the policeman. He rubbed his neck gently, looking down at the unconscious maniac.

"Come into the house," Fay was saying. "We'll call a doctor."

"No. Wait," Stan said. "I want to find out why he tried to kill me."

"Hell—pardon me," the policeman said. "These kind don't have a reason. They just do it. He's a homicidal maniac." He had taken out his handcuffs. He drooped to his knees and fastened them on the unconscious man's wrists.

Stan looked hesitatingly at the unconscious face. In repose, it was a nice face. Likeable. The man couldn't be more than thirty.

"Who is he?" Stan asked quietly.

"His name's James Hoff," the policeman said. "Killed three men and wounded four more two years ago. Perfect strangers. He knew he did it, but couldn't give any reason."

Other policeman were running up. A police car was speeding up the driveway.

"James Hoff," Stan repeated slowly.

He watched while the maniac was lifted and tossed roughly into the back of the police car.

"Poor fellow," Mr. Bulfinch said condescendingly. "It's a shame he does such things. Bad enough when one has a reason and makes the decision. Let's go in, Stan. Get a doctor for you."

"I wonder what James Hoff was doing in this neighborhood," Stan said,

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his eyes on the departing police car.

"If he hadn't been in this one, it would have been another," Fay said. Her expression became teasing. "Don't tell me there's something in your past that might give James Hoff a reason for trying to kill you," she said.

Stan looked at her thoughtfully. "Have I ever kissed you?" he asked abruptly.

A strange expression crossed her face. "No," she said, "but for a moment, when you said that, I had a distinct impression that you had."

From the corner of his eye, Stan saw Mr. Bulfinch beat a hasty retreat into the house. But he was only half aware of it. Fay stood before him, hesitant. He knew he had only to move toward her. He held out his arms. She was in them without having seemed to move, her lips pressed hungrily against his.

"I wasn't very lady-like about it, was I," she said afterwards, laughing nervously. "It was just that I thought I had lost you...when that maniac had you on the ground trying to kill you."

"You sure that's the reason you thought you'd lost me?" Stan asked.

"Why, of course," Fay said. "That is, I don't know. Why are you asking these questions, Stan?" She kissed him on the point of his chin. "Does a person have to have a reason for everything? I mean, must I pause and analyze my feelings and reactions so I can account for every little thing I do?"

"Of course not, Fay," Stan said. "Only for murder." He felt her tremble. "I'm sorry darling," he said quickly. "I shouldn't have drawn that comparison."

"Let's go in," Fay said. "I want to look at that throat of yours before the others come."

"I'M NOT sure he's the man," Judge Stevens, a giant of a man in his early forties, chewed thoughtfully on his cigar.

"Now, Fred," Senator Blake remonstrated, "I thought we'd decided to let Frank pick the man."

"Yes," Mr. Bulfinch said. "You turned it over to me—all of you. Stan is my choice."

"Why don't you think he's the man?" from Governor Thomas, a pink-faced man of heavy build.

"What's this all about?" Stan interposed laughingly. "I gather I'm the subject of your conversation. Maybe I have something to say about it."

"Very little," Judge Stevens said.

"In that case," Stan said, rising from the table, "if you'll excuse me..." He looked over at Fay. She rose and joined him.

Judge Stevens' wife spoke: "Maybe we ladies had better leave our warriors to fight this civil war by themselves."

Fay led Stan across the huge room to the French doors of a balcony. The older women were rising and heading toward the doors to another part of the mansion. The men remained at the table studying one another, while servants cleaned away the dinner as unobtrusively as possible.

"Looks like they're preparing for a battle royal," Stan said, as he and Fay stepped out on the balcony. "I wonder what it's about. And just what do I have to do with it."

"I don't know exactly," Fay said. "But I would guess that they're considering grooming you for some political career—probably as Senator. Things like that take handling. Speeches, the right publicity in the papers, a slow bringing of you into the public limelight, so that the voting public knows of you before you attempt to run for office."

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"...I'm telling you..." It was Mr. Bulfinch's voice raised suddenly in anger, coming to them through the closed French windows.

"Whoo!" Fay said softly. "Dad's mad."

"Maybe I am, too," Stan said. "I can't understand their picking me for anything in the first place, and once they have, I can't understand what Judge Stevens would have against me. I've never met him."

"You don't know these men," Fay said. "Especially my dad. I've seen him make or break a man just to keep in practice, so he could do it when he had to."

"That still doesn't answer my question."

"Why answer it?" Fay moved closer to him.

"Because I want it answered," Stan said, ignoring her hint. He leaned against the metal railing and looked out over the moon-drenched grounds.

"That's your answer—maybe," Fay said.

"What is?"

"POSSIBLY they want a man who looks like a potential big shot, but who underneath is willing to take orders in the usual way. Hints, advice, suggestions. Judge Stevens is a good judge of character. He may have estimated you as a man who might make trouble, rather than follow orders."

"I don't think that's it," Stan said slowly. "It's something I feel, but can't quite touch. That maniac trying to kill me is part of it. You're part of it, Fay. Other things—something that happened when I took a vacation a few weeks ago. Maybe you can understand what I'm driving at. It's like a law case or anything else. You start in by getting items. Incidents or figures or whatever the items are. You put them away in your mind. After a while, you get a sort of perspective—a feel."

"I know what you're talking about there," Fay said, putting her elbows on the rail and cupping her face in her hands, her shoulder touching Stan's. "It's the same in tennis or bridge or anything." She stared broodingly down at the lawn. "I can see why Dad's interested in you," she said finally. Then, after another silence, "But what could that maniac possibly have to do with it? He just happened to be here. He didn't know you. You were just handy when he wanted to kill somebody. Surely you don't think— It would be silly. Absurd. How could anyone hire a maniac to escape and show up at the opportune time to kill you?"

"Change your 'hire' to 'move' and your 'anyone' to 'something'," Stan said, "and you get close to the feeling I have about everything that's taking place—including the argument going on inside now."

Fay frowned. "How could something move a maniac to show up at the opportune time and kill you?" She stared into space for a moment, then shivered. "What a gruesome thought!"

The knob of the French door behind them rattled unnecessarily. It opened. Mr. Bulfinch stood there. "Stan, my boy," he said calmly, "how would you like to go to Washington as a Congressman?"

"SO THEY offered to groom you for a political career and you accepted," Bill Freemont said.

"Yeah," Stan said, tapping the eraser end of a pencil against the desk top. "I wish I'd turned them down. I don't expect anything but trouble from it."

"Trouble?" Bill said. "Why? What kind of trouble?"

"Trouble without reason," Stan said. "I feel it. I feel it so strongly,

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that I'd be willing to bet anything that it will come."

The phone shrilled. Bill and Stan looked at it, then at each other with lifted eyebrows.

"Yes?" Stan said when he lifted the receiver.

"There's a gentleman out here to see you, Mr. Oliver," Gertrude's voice came. "A Mr. Budwick."

Stan cupped his hand over the phone. "Get behind that screen over there, Bill," he said. "You can peek out without being seen." Then, into the phone, "OK, Gertrude. Let him come in."

Mr. Budwick was a slim-waisted broad-shouldered man of forty. His sartorial perfection would have been almost effeminate except for his features, Stan decided. Orderliness was the dominant theme of the man, from each single strand of his hair down to his shoelaces, from the expression on his face, to the way he held the neatly folded newspaper in his left hand while he came forward with right hand extended.

"Mr. Oliver?" he said. "I'm Mr. Budwick. James Budwick."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Budwick," Stan said. "What did you want to see me about?"

"I came to see you about this newspaper statement of yours," Mr. Budwick said, opening the paper onto a clear area of the desk.

Stan looked at the paper with intense interest, wondering how there could be a statement from him in it without his knowledge. The first two paragraphs of the item brought a smile to his lips. It was a very expertly done buildup that would leave the impression with the reader that he had been a prominent political figure for a long time. The kind of thing that would make the reader think, "Am I dumb not to remember Stanley Oliver! But I'll remember him after this!"

The gist of the statement was in one sentence which read: "The per inmate expense of maintaining the state penal and hospital institutions is almost twice what it should be. A thorough investigation should be launched by Governor Thomas."

Stan read it aloud for the benefit of Bill Freemont, behind the screen.

"Well," Stan said. "What about it, Mr. Budwick?"

"Just this, Mr. Oliver," Mr. Budwick said quietly, "I'm well aware of the power you hold in this state. To show you how much I know, I know that the Governor launched his investigation yesterday, and that your statement coming today ties in with it. I'm advising you to stop the whole thing, or there will be trouble. Serious trouble."

"But Mr. Budwick," Stan said, smiling. "Surely you can't be serious. Assuming I had the power you think I have—and I assure you I don't—it seems to me such an investigation is worth while. It's the taxpayers' money."

"You lie and hedge, Mr. Oliver," Mr. Budwick said coldly. "The taxpayers' money will not be saved. It will go into other rackets and—"

"Just a minute," Stan interrupted. "I don't like your attitude. I don't know who you are. I suspect you're a crackpot. I don't have the time to listen to you. Get out."

"I'll get out, yes," Mr. Budwick said calmly. "But before I go—"

His hand darted inside his coat. Stan leaped forward and seized the hand, calling to Bill. Bill darted out from behind the screen. Together, they managed to subdue Mr. Budwick, who had suddenly taken on almost superhuman strength.

"Call the police, Gertrude," Stan ordered, as his secretary stuck her blanched face through the doorway.

He and Bill were each sitting on an

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arm. Mr. Budwick had quieted down. Stan reached inside the man's coat and brought out an ugly-looking .38 automatic.

"Just who are you?" Stan asked.

"Don't tell me you don't know!" Mr. Budwick taunted.

"YOU WERE right, Stan," Bill said, as he came in the door and planted himself on the edge of the desk. "I just came from the police station. Budwick is or was a clerk in a men's clothing store. This morning, he got a permit to buy a gun, and went out and bought it. His story now is that he doesn't know why he bought the gun. It was before the newspaper came out, too. When the newspaper came out, he had the gun on him. He read that article, hunted up your office address in the phone book, and came over here with the intention of killing you. He doesn't know why. Right now, he's horrified about it, and wants to be kept locked up so he won't try anything like that again. They put him under observation in the psycho ward at the city hospital."

"He has no previous history of insanity?" Stan asked.

"He says not. They're checking on it."

"While you were gone, I called Bulfinch," Stan said. "He gave me the lowdown. They're going to start an economy program anyway. It was an opportunity to launch me. I 'make a suggestion' and the Governor follows it."

"I suppose he'll also recognize you by making a reply," Bill said. He looked at Stan queerly. "But how does this stuff of insane people trying to kill you fit in? The attack by the escaped maniac could be put down to coincidence. Even this could. But what made you expect something like it?"

"If I were to tell you, you'd think I'm crazy, too," Stan said. "But actually, I don't know. You took a lot of science in college besides your law, didn't you?"

"Yes," Bill said.

"In science," Stan went on, "you make a theory, and from the theory you make a prediction. If the prediction comes true, you have reason to believe the theory is true or very close to the truth."

"That's right," Bill said. "They call it the experimental method. And if the prediction isn't quite true, you change the theory to account for what happens, then make a new prediction."

"That's what I did," Stan said. "My prediction came true. That makes the theory more probable. I'll make another prediction now. There's going to be more trouble. This time..." He closed his eyes, frowning in concentration. "An accident. Probably traffic accident. It has to be one where the human factor determines it, not the failure of parts, not a mechanical failure."

"I get the idea," Bill said slowly. "There's an old railroad superstition that things come in threes. It could be. Maybe you'd better be careful."

"Don't worry," Stan said. "I will." He glanced at his watch. "My gosh, I'm late. I promised to be out at Bulfinch's at five-thirty."

"Take it easy," Bill called after him as he dashed out the door.

STAN DROVE his car out of the parking lot with a wary eye on street traffic. Twice in three blocks, he had to slam on the brakes to keep from being hit by cars that zoomed past him and cut back in too soon.

Once on the arterial, he felt safer, until two cars passed him on either side and tried to squeeze him between them. In a split second decision, he turned against one of them, forcing it

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over far enough so that the other didn't touch him. It was close work, but he was lucky. There would be no more than scraped paint.

Out of the corner of his eye, he had seen the other driver as they came together. The man had seemed in a daze, but had snapped out of it when he felt the jar of contact.

A short time later, two cars just ahead crashed together, swinging around to block all four lanes while the air was filled with the sounds of screeching tires and rending metal.

Stan realized that if he had been two cars ahead of where he was, he would have been in the thick of the mass crash. He licked his lips nervously, feeling that the sea of cars around him was a hostile force, closing in, intent on getting him.

He reached the driveway into the Bulfinch estate. A feeling of security came over him. He suddenly realized how keyed up he had been, how much under a strain. From the street came the sounds of traffic, horns tooting, motors zooming. And it was no longer the aggregate noises of individual cars, but the sound of an integrated thing, a thing that had tried to get him and failed.

But how much of it had been just his imagination, Stan asked himself as he rolled along the winding driveway. Such things happened to every driver every day, though perhaps not quite so persistently. And there was such a thing as a persecution complex. Any competent physician would be quite positive about it. He would never believe that a consistent pattern of attempted destruction could exist unless there were some single individual behind it.

People who believed that total strangers without rhyme or reason or motivation were out to get them, were considered insane. But also, people who clung to beliefs against overwhelming evidence were insane.

Even Bill, unable to grasp the picture, had struggled with it for a while and then decided he was thinking in terms of superstition.

As Stan parked his car on the smooth blacktop parking area near the mansion, he decided that after this he would keep his thoughts to himself. Tomorrow, he would tell Bill he had decided he was having pipe dreams. Tonight? Tonight he would have fun with Fay, and study her...

"LET'S GO nightclubbing, Stan," Fay suggested after dinner.

"Go ahead, go ahead," Mr. Bulfinch said. "I'm retiring early tonight."

Stan hesitated. "How about staying here?" he smiled. "I noticed a nice grand piano. I'd like to hear you play, Fay."

"I haven't been out all day," she pouted. "I'd like to go out to Sid's Rendezvous for a little excitement."

"Better give in, my boy," Mr. Bulfinch chuckled. "You'll have to before the evening is over, anyway." With another chuckle, he turned his back and left the room.

"Well?" Fay coaxed.

"For a very good reason, I'd like to stay here rather than go out," Stan said.

Fay moved closer to him, leaning her body against his lightly, one arched finger tapping his nose playfully. "Please. For me. We can have a few drinks, and drive out into the country." Her eyes held smoldering fires of invitation and promise.

"I see what your father means," Stan sighed. "Come on. I have only one life to lay at your feet."

For the first few blocks in traffic, he watched warily, ready to avoid anything that might happen. The cars around him, however, seemed to avoid him rather than threaten him.

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Cars ahead seemed to sense his approach and move over. Cars coming from side roads stopped to let him by. Gradually, he relaxed. When they reached Sid's Rendezvous, he was beginning to enjoy himself.

Fay had sat sideways with her legs curled up on the seat, watching him. She had said nothing. And when, from time to time, he had looked over at her and smiled, she had returned the smile gravely.

"Well, here we are, darling," he said, shutting off the motor.

She made no move to get out. Stan reached past her to open the door. She caught his wrist. He looked at her questioningly. Her lips parted. They glistened wetly in the feeble light of the parking area. She guided his arm slowly around her slim waist.

When she had guided it as far as she could, she released his wrist and arched her back, curving against him, her lips a scant inch from his.

His hand groped for and touched the door handle. He kissed her and opened the door simultaneously. "Come on, honey," he said. "You were the one who wanted to come out to Sid's. Remember?"

HE CAUGHT a glimpse of the angry lights in her eyes. But before they had reached the entrance to the nightclub, her hand had stolen into his and he knew she had put his rebuff down to desire to go into the club.

Was that his reason, he asked himself. And he knew it wasn't. There was something else. Why hadn't the cars around him on the road been hostile when she was with him? A vague uneasiness was growing in him about Fay. It was wordless, because he knew no words to explain what he thought he was beginning to sense.

The other Fay, the Focus, had told him there were no words to explain things to him. She had said he would e v e n t u a l l y know that which he couldn't then understand. He hadn't known what she was talking about. Now, there were so many things, unexplainable except by the conventional explanations of mental abberation....

"Snap out of it, Stan," Fay said. "Stop daydreaming."

He snapped back to the present and looked up. He was sitting at a table across from Fay. The waiter was waiting politely for him to order.

He hid his surprise in a frowning perusal of the menu, while he searched his mind frantically for memory of having come in here and to this table. The last thing he could remember of his external surroundings was walking across the parking area toward the entrance.

"What would you like, Fay?" he asked.

"You are getting absent-minded," she said. "You just gave my order to the waiter. He's waiting for yours."

"Oh," Stan said weakly. "Uh...I'll take the same."

He folded the menu and handed it to the waiter. He kept his eyes on the back of the man as he weaved his way between tables toward the kitchen. His hands fumbled absently in his pocket, bringing out a pack of cigarettes.

"Want one?" he smiled, extending the pack across the table.

"HAVE YOU seen the papers today?" Bill asked as he came in.

"No," Stan said tiredly. "I didn't get to bed last night until four this morning. It was all I could do to get myself down to the office this morning."

"Take a look." Bill tossed the paper on Stan's desk.

STATE FUNDS MISUSED, the headline shouted.

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Stan skimmed the two columns of fine print. In each of the four state hospitals and in both of the penitentiaries, the personel had divided into opposing groups, one apparently rallying around the banner of Stanley Oliver, "Crusader extraordinary," and the other against him and "his meddling." Misuse of funds seemed relatively unimportant beside that, according to the papers. And most remarkable of all, there were vague references to other newspapers that hinted at a press war.

"Around me as the focal point!" the thought formed unbidden in Stan's mind.

"What do the other papers say, Bill?" Stan said. "This one hints at something going on."

The phone rang before Bill could answer.

"Mr. Bulfinch on the wire," Gertrude's voice sounded.

"Put him on," Stan said. "Hello, Mr. Bulfinch."

"Hello, Stanley, my boy," Mr. Bulfinch's voice came over the phone. "It seems that your name has caused quite a furor everywhere. We hadn't expected that. Most remarkable."

"It certainly is," Stan said. "But I thought maybe you had had something to do with it."

"No," came the reply. "It's a very good thing though. Unless those that oppose you grow to be the majority. Just sit back and do nothing."

"What do you mean by that?" Stan asked.

"Haven't the reporters been up to interview you yet?"

"No," Stan said. "Why should they come up to interview me?"

"You're news, lad," Mr. Bulfinch said. "A natural. The newspapers are sensing that already. It's something they know, but don't bother to try to explain. There is no explanation. Some people, even very important people, have zero news value or negative value. Put them in the paper and people yawn and turn away from the stands. Others—like you—when their name's in the paper, draw like flies. People flock to the stands and buy the papers as fast as they appear. It's a sort of mass instinct of the herd, one reporter once told me.

"So they'll be up. Often from now on. Just be careful what you say to them."

"Don't worry, Mr. Bulfinch," Stan said. "I will." He hung up slowly and looked up at Bill's grinning face. "That was Mr. Bulfinch," he said dryly.

THE PHONE rang again. "There are two reporters in the outer office, Mr. Oliver," Gertrude said very respectfully.

"Show them in, Miss Green." Stan winked at Bill. "And don't get the big head. It's me that's become notorious, not you."

The door burst open. Two men came in. "You're Mr. Oliver?" one of them demanded, looking from Stan to Bill, then settling on Stan when he nodded.

"Why did you give orders to the Governor to clamp down on state hospital graft?" the man shot out.

"Me give the Governor orders? Don't be absurd!"

"Why did James Hoff try to kill you?" the reporter asked immediately, indicating he had his questions prepared ahead of time. "He claimed it was because you kept a sadistic torturer in charge of his ward who bragged that he had a drag with the 'big boss', and that the big boss was you."

"No comment on that should be necessary," Stan said coldly. "You should be too intelligent to even consider the rantings of an irresponsible maniac."

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"Are you the behind-the-scenes boss of the political machine in this state?" the man asked almost before Stan had stopped talking.

"No...comment," Stan said, the last word slipping out unbidden and surprising him.

"Thank you, Mr. Oliver," the reporter said, backing toward the door with his companion beside him. "Thank you!" And they were gone.

"Oh, brother," Bill said prayerfully.

"What's the matter?" Stan asked. "Did I say something wrong? I don't remember giving them anything they asked for."

"Wait until you read what they make of this interview," Bill said. "You'll learn your first lesson in journalism."

Stan stared at Bill, digesting what he had said. Suddenly, he was tired. "I'm going to take a nap, Bill," he said. "Come back in an hour and wake me, will you?"

"You should go to bed nights, pal," Bill grinned.

THE FINGERS were working with smooth efficiency on the keyboard of the giant machine. In one corner of his mind, he recognized it as a typesetting machine. One in a row of a dozen. There was a typewritten paper on the flat place beside the keyboard. His eyes were scanning it—automatically—and his fingers were typing out the words on the sheet.

He tried to read consciously what he was setting in type. A corner of his mind said, "Uh-uh! Read and you'll fumble."

Consciousness of the typewritten sheet receded in the presence of something else. A nebulous cloud of thoughts in which he was fishing on a lake, quarreling with a nice-looking woman, and worrying about the foot of a little girl. The woman seemed to be his wife, and the little girl his daughter. It amused him, and the idly swirling thoughts lashed out at him angrily.

And the fingers continued touching the keys with a light sureness, machinelike as the machine they operated.

Anger surged through Stan. He forced his thoughts back to the typewritten sheet of paper, demanding of his eyes that they consciously read the words.

"Uh-uh! Read and you'll fumble!" a voice mocked him with childlike unconcern.

The anger surged through him with renewed force, directed at the voice, with nameless forces flowing in it.

A pain stabbed into his chest. A flood of thoughts about heart trouble; a flash of stark fear rose into his consciousness for a split second.

He awakened with the presence of death vivid and personal etched in his mind. With it were words in clear pica type on a sheet of paper: "Stanley Oliver sidestepped the direct question of whether he was political boss of the state with the fatuous 'No comment'."

He shook his head wearily. "What a nightmare," he muttered. He looked at his watch. He had been asleep half an hour. He cradled his head in his arms on his desk again and tried to go back to sleep. The nightmare remained too vivid. With it was a host of discomforting impressions of events before those that had awakened him, with a memory of something vast and hostile in the background. Something akin to the stream of traffic that had resented his presence and tried to kill him the night before. Something integrated, sentient, yet more like a bewildered and untamed herd of milling bison than a consciously alert creature.

The knob of the office door turned softly. The door cracked open. Ger-

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trude's face appeared. "You're awake!" she said. "That reporter that was here is on the phone. I told him you were taking a nap. He bet me a dollar you were awake. Said he'd take my word for it." She made a rueful face. "I lost. He wants to talk to you."

"Put him on," Stan sighed.

He lifted the receiver and waited. A moment later, there was a click as his line was connected.

"Mr. Oliver?" the familiar voice said grimly. "I thought you would like to know the typesetter setting up the interview with you just died at his machine—of heart trouble. If you think we're scared—we are. But we're going to fight you now. Really fight you, until we make it too hot for you to remain in this state."

"How could I possibly have anything to do with—" Stan began. He gave up trying to deny anything and hung up, sighing deeply. "The world is crazy," he said. The words had something familiar about them. He frowned in thought until it came to him. The Focus—Fay—had said just that.

STAN LOOKED at the grim expression on Bill's face. Then, his eyes dropped to the front page of the newspaper to the line where Bill's finger pointed. "Another typesetter was put on the job immediately. He took out the bars of type that Sid Carter had already done and proceeded to read them to find out where to begin. It was then that the remarkable last words of the man who had supposedly died of heart trouble were discovered, for he had molded them in imperishable lead, where they will remain forever.

"Those last words were few and to the point. There was not time for more. They were: 'Stanley Oliver is trying to murder me. I think he may succeed.' The words of a man demented? Medical science would say yes. The courts in this city or any other city would say yes. Yet, we who knew Sid Carter cannot think so. The coincidence is too strong, too definite, to be accidental.

"The *Globe-Chronicle* now has a personal stake in this war against political racketeers. We now openly and formally declare war on Stanley Oliver, and his stooges or slaves or whatever they are. Whatever power he holds over them, whatever the power he used to stop Sid Carter's heart, let him use it. Its very use will be his downfall. It will not only prove to the world he has unknown weapons or powers that he used without compunction nor conscience, but it will also further strengthen our determination to eventually expose him for what he is and bring him to justice—the justice that is not equipped to deal with him now."

"So that's how he found out," Stan said softly.

"Found out?" Bill said in a cracked voice. "Then it's true?"

"I don't know," Stan said sharply. "I didn't mean it that way. I seem to be saying a lot of things lately I don't mean the way they sound. Of course, I didn't kill him. How could I?" He stared at Bill defiantly. "What I meant was that the reporter called me and accused me of killing the typesetter, and I simply wondered what made him think that. Now, I know. Some more insanity."

"Like Budwick and Hoff?" Bill suggested.

"Yes." Stan's eyes were on Bill, watching the look of fear grow in his face, and his attempt to conceal it.

HIS EYES red from lack of sleep, Stan nibbled at his breakfast of cereal, toast and coffee, while he read

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the two morning papers. Both of them were on his side. They pointed out with subtle sarcasm the absurdity of Stanley Oliver being able to kill a man while not even within a mile of him. They examined the possible motives, showing the silliness of even the most rational one—that of preventing the attack against him from being set in type—when any fool would know that another typesetter would replace the one that died.

They went from there to examine the possible motives of the *Globe-Chronicle* for attacking a man well known to be above reproach. A man destined to become a Congressman, perhaps even the President, eventually. In that, Stan could see the hand of Mr. Bulfinch working skillfully. He tried to grin about it, but couldn't.

He laid the papers aside and stared blankly at the white marble surface of the cafeteria table, his thoughts returning as they had constantly during the night to what he knew to be true. Horribly true. He had killed Sid Carter. There was no getting around it. He examined his every memory of the event and couldn't honestly decide whether he had intended to kill the man or not. He decided he hadn't known he could, and that was too little to salve his conscience.

He glanced at his watch. It was nine-thirty. Leaving the papers on the table, he got up and went out the side door into the lobby of the building.

The elevator man, Homer, who had never missed smiling at him and greeting him warmly, "didn't see" him. It could have been a real oversight, but Homer stopped at his floor for him and no one else got out of the car.

The office door was locked. Stan frowned. It was the first time he had had to use his key in the morning since Gertrude had started working for him. A stab of loneliness shot through him when he entered the office. He looked toward Gertrude's desk. There was an envelope propped against the inkwell.

There was writing on the outside. He walked toward the desk slowly until he could make it out. In Gertrude's neat script was his name: Mr. Oliver. He took the envelope in his fingers and turned it over. It was unsealed. Inside was a folded paper. He took it out and read: "Dear Mr. Oliver, I've enjoyed working for you, but my aunt on the west coast is ill and I have to move where she is and get a job so I can be near her. You can mail my check to my old address and it will be forwarded to me. Thanks a lot, Gertrude."

He crumpled the letter in his fist, a bitter expression on his face. His eyes went to the outside phone. He hesitated, then with lips compressed in a straight line he picked it up and dialed Gertrude's home number. It rang twelve times, then stopped. Someone had lifted the receiver. Stan remained silent, waiting. Finally, a faint voice, Gertrude's, said, "Hello?"

"This is Mr. Oliver," he said.

"Oh, hello Mr. Oliver," Gertrude said. Her voice was almost hysterically cordial. "I'm busy packing. That's why I didn't get to the phone sooner. My train leaves in an hour. My boyfriend is here helping me. He'll take me to the train. Sorry I had to leave in a hurry this way, my aunt is very ill—" She stopped abruptly. He could hear her panting like a cornered animal.

"Gertrude," he said in a slow calm voice. "Listen to me. You're afraid. You don't need to be. If you come back to work, you will have nothing to fear. You understand? If you come back to work."

"If—if I come back?" Gertrude said tremulously.

"Yes, Gertrude," Stan said slowly.

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"If you come back. As long as you work for me, nothing will happen to you."

He laid the phone back on its cradle softly. "I shouldn't have done that," he said to himself. His face was woodenly expressionless as he crossed to his own office door and went in.

"WHERE'S Gertrude?" Dave asked casually. "Home sick?"

"No," Stan said. "Homesick. She'll be down pretty soon though." He had started to grin at the expected laugh from Dave over his play on words, but it hadn't come. There was still that fear in Dave's eyes, well concealed now, however.

"The Rumford case is coming up in the next couple of weeks," Dave said. "I think you should be the one to appear in court to defend Basil Rumford."

"What's the matter with you?" Stan asked. "You were enthusiastic about it."

"I was," Dave said, "but I've been thinking of taking a vacation and going east. To New York maybe."

The door opened and Getrude came in. "I'm here, Mr. Oliver," she announced with a forced air of casualness.

"That's good," Stan said. He smiled slowly. "Dave tells me he would like to take a long vacation. Go to New York maybe."

"Oh, no!" Gertrude cried quickly. "You can't. You mustn't! She bit her lip to stop talking. Her eyes were large and round.

Dave looked from her to Stan. The phone in the outer office was ringing unheeded.

"Your phone's ringing, Gertrude," Stan said calmly.

She turned and went out, closing the door behind her.

Stan's phone rang. "Mr. Bullfinch on the wire," Gertrude said.

"OK," Stan looked up at Dave. "Better reconsider your trip to New York, Dave," he said softly. "You're needed here. Oh, hello, Mr. Bulfinch... In an hour? I'll be there... Of course."

He hung up. "How about coffee before I go, Dave?" he asked.

"No, thanks," Dave said. "I'd better get to work on that Rumford case."

"Then you're not going to New York?" Stan asked eagerly.

"No," Dave said, turning away and going to the connecting door to his own office.

Stan looked at the closed door for a minute, a bitter smile twisting his lips.

His attention shifted to the phone. He picked it up and told Gertrude to call the Bulfinch residence. Shortly, he heard Fay's cheery "Hello."

"Stan," he identified himself. Then, he was silent, his ears listening for her first involuntary reaction.

"Darling!" she said happily. "Your first telephone call to me! This is wonderful."

"Then, you aren't afraid of me after the *Globe-Chronicle's* crazy charges against me?"

"Afraid of you? Don't tell me anyone's afraid of you!"

"Oh, no," Stan said. "I just wondered if you were."

"Of course I am, darling," Fay laughed. "The things you do to me. All day, I've been suffering in terrible agony—from loneliness for you."

"If this were a pay phone, I'd stick in a quarter for you," Stan teased. "Instead, how about my picking you up at eight this evening, and we'll go places and do things?"

"Make it seven-thirty, darling," Fay said. "I can't possibly wait until eight."

"Listen, Fay," Stan said abruptly. "I can't wait until seven—all of a sudden. I'm going to be busy this

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morning. But suppose I drop by about two o'clock and we go out riding this afternoon, then have dinner someplace and go on from there."

"I was wishing for that, but didn't dare suggest it," Fay said. "I'll be ready."

"Bye now," Stan said, and hung up.

Getting up, he went to the outer office. "I'll be gone the rest of the day, Gertrude," he said. "If anything important comes up before noon, you can reach me at Bulfinch's office."

PASSING through the building lobby, he glanced into the cafeteria in time to see the two reporters from the *Globe-Chronicle* duck out of sight. They were on the job, all right. Maybe they would even follow him. If they did, they would have a long ride in the afternoon when he and Fay went out.

As he turned into the street from the parking lot, he caught sight of them getting into a car. And when he parked at the curb in front of the building where Mr. Bulfinch had his offices, their car passed slowly.

"I can see the afternoon headlines," Stan thought. "Political boss confers with stooges. And it wasn't so long ago no one knew who I was!"

He entered the building and rode up to the fourteenth floor where Mr. Bulfinch's law firm occupied a palatial suite of offices.

"Go right in," the beautiful receptionist smiled.

Stan knocked, then opened the door. His eyebrows lifted as he saw Senator Blake, Governor Thomas, and Judge Stevens sitting at the rich walnut conference table. Mr. Bulfinch was the only one who smiled. The others regarded him with a solemn lack of expression.

"You're a little early, Stanley," Mr. Bulfinch said. "But it's probably for the best. We have dissent in our ranks, and you may as well get into the thick of it."

"No dissent," Governor Thomas said calmly. "Unless you could call Mr. Bulfinch's natural desire to further his own interests dissent. We've just decided, Mr. Oliver, that in view of the unfavorable publicity you've been receiving lately, it's better to let you drop out of things. Forget about political ambitions."

"So that's the way things lie," Stan said softly, taking a vacant seat at the end of the table opposite Mr. Bulfinch. "Well, I can't say that I blame you. You're probably right—except for one thing."

"What's that?" Judge Stevens asked sharply.

"Unfortunately, you can't just drop me," Stan said. "I already know what the headlines are going to be this afternoon. They're going to be, Political Boss Oliver Confers With Stooges."

"What!" several voices said at once.

"The two reporters from the *Globe-Chronicle* followed me here," Stan explained. "You surely know they aren't going to let go of the tail of the bull they're stuck with. No amount of disassociating you could try would divorce you from me. You're stuck with me, and I'm stuck with you."

"Like hell we are!" Judge Stevens shouted.

"Oh, yes, you are," Stan said quietly. "I didn't particularly want to enter politics. I would be very happy to drop the whole thing. But I'm going to tell you something. Especially you, Judge Stevens. There are things you can't comprehend. Things that I can't quite grasp. Did I kill that typesetter Sid Carter? I honestly don't know. All I know is that at the instant he died, I *wanted to*."

"The—the man's insane!" Judge Stevens sputtered, looking around at the others.

"Think so?" Stan said coolly.

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An uncomfortable silence settled over the room. Eyes looked at him, then turned away uncomfortably.

"I don't especially like the way things are going," Stan went on finally. "I'd quit if I could. A few weeks ago, I was a happy nonentity. Now..." He took a deep breath. "Things beyond my or your control are in motion. I was told—that is, I expect to understand those forces eventually. Right now, I can't predict what might happen. Like in the death of the typesetter."

"Let me get this straight," Judge Stevens said darkly. "Are you implying that any of us who don't play things your way will get what Sid Carter got?"

"Of course, nothing's going to happen to any of you," Stan said warmly, "because you're going to be sensible. If that's all I was called here for, I'll be going."

"WHERE ARE we going, Stan?" Fay asked lazily. She was curled up against the door on her side of the seat, watching the shoreline of the Pacific.

"Up to a spot where I spent my two weeks' vacation just recently," Stan said. He glanced at the speedometer needle which pointed at the ninety mark. "We should be there before sundown."

A half hour of silence passed. "What's there?" Fay asked suddenly.

"Huh?" Stan said. Then, remembering, "Oh, maybe nothing, maybe something. I'm just hoping." He grinned crookedly. "Ever see a flying saucer, darling?"

He looked up into the rear view mirror and frowned. There was a car following them.

"Don't tell me there's one up here in the Olympics!" Fay said. "What's the matter, darling?"

"Car following us," Stan said. "I don't like it. I'm going to slow down and let him pass."

He let up on the gas slightly. The car in back slowed down also.

"They're definitely following us," Stan said uneasily. "It must be those two reporters from the *Globe-Chronicle*. They were following me this morning, but I'd forgotten about them."

Fay laughed. "Let them," she said. "They're getting the ride of their lives."

Stan glanced at the speedometer and forced its needle up close to a hundred. Soon, the car in back was out of sight.

"Maybe we can ditch them," he said. "If I can hold a hundred for half an hour, we'll be far enough ahead so that we can get out of sight off the road and let them go by."

Curves and straightaways rushed madly towards them, to be devoured smoothly into the maw of the hood.

"Remember that maniac that tried to kill me the first time I saw you?" Stan asked suddenly.

"That wasn't the first time," Fay said. "Oh—that's right, it was, wasn't it? Gee, it seems like we've known each other for years!"

"I wish now I hadn't brought you along out here," Stan said. "I have a feeling that there's going to be trouble. I keep forgetting that events don't follow normal patterns any more."

He was silent a while. Fay watched him without comment.

"I asked you if you had ever seen a flying saucer," Stan said finally. "I knew you hadn't. I went riding in one on my vacation. It took me out into space. I was coming out here to see if it would come back again. Do you believe that, Fay?"

He waited for her to answer. It was several minutes before she spoke. "I think I do," she said slowly. "I haven't

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said anything about it, but some very strange things have been going on inside of me since I met you—even before I met you. They sort of prepared me for you, you might say."

"What sort of things?" Stan asked, glancing in the rear view mirror at the empty ribbon of highway behind.

"It's hard to explain," Fay said. She pulled her legs out from under her and sat up straight. "I felt a sort of awakening. That's as near as I can describe it. Like I was myself, and yet not myself. When I first saw you, Stan, I felt that I had seen you before. Even now, I keep thinking I've known you longer than I have. Sometimes, I'm sure of it. It's more than just love. There's that, too; but the love is just a trapping for something deeper."

She stopped talking. When Stan was sure she was through, he said, "I'm glad you told me that. Now, I can tell you more than I had intended to."

Slowly at first, then swiftly, he told her everything, including his forcing Gertrude to return to work.

"You say this girl called herself the Focus and didn't seem to have a name?" Fay said when he had finished. "Why did you name her Fay?"

Stan grinned briefly. "She kept striking me as being not quite right—Fay."

"Oh," Fay said. She watched as the car rounded a wide curve and brought a long straight stretch into view. "Do you know the significance of her calling herself the Focus?"

"It's a title of some sort, I suppose," Stan said.

"I don't think so," Fay said. "The rays of the sun are widely dispersed. With a magnifying glass, they can be bent and focused into a small spot—and burn with their heat."

"There's that car again!" Stan said.

Fay twisted around and looked back. The pursuing car was over a mile behind them, slowly creeping up on this straight stretch of highway.

"GO ON with what you were saying," Stan said. "They won't dare try anything at this speed. And we have maybe a half hour before we'll have to slow down for bad roads."

"This strange ball of cold fire she captured in a bowl and apparently poured into you," Fay said. "Obviously, it's changed you. It's the cause of everything that's been happening. I think it's changed you so that you are a Focus."

"But—" Stan began.

"No. Let me finish," Fay interrupted him. "Under that skull of yours are millions of brain cells that are the components of your thinking. If you had no consciousness and could still think, there would be many separate trains of thought in your unconscious mind, each going its separate way. The focal point of consciousness takes them and controls them to a large extent, making conscious thought. What is this consciousness? We don't know. What is the *I*, the thing in your mind that owns all conscious thought? It's a sort of focus of mental activity, preserving itself under all the changes in thought. Even in cases of amnesia when all past memory of identity is lost, there is still the *I* that doesn't know who it is.

"The picture I get is that you are becoming in a small way the *I* of the human race. All the individual human beings going their separate ways are the brain cells of the mass intellect. They are—or have been up to now—a vast mass mind without a unifying focus of consciousness. An insane, mind, split into a hundred different ideological entities, all fighting for

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survival and/or supremacy without any of them ever succeeding very well.

"But now, due to what they did to you on that space ship, you are the ego, the focus through which all mass thinking will become channeled more and more.

"The individual human beings such as Dad, will sense it without knowing what it is they sense. Some of them, slaves of some minor mass entity, will fight it tooth and nail. Others, components of benevolent mass minds, will rush into the growing matrix of mass sanity just as rational thought rushes to the sick mind when it recovers."

"And your part?" Stan asked.

"I think I'm fulfilling it right now," Fay said gravely. "You said these people from the flying saucers have no sense of humor. You're partly right and partly wrong. It would be more accurate to say they're literal. I can see what the Focus did in my case. You had called her Fay. She set out to bring into your sphere a girl whose name actually was Fay, and out of all the Fays, she chose the one who would resemble her somewhat. All the time she was working with alien concepts, archaic concepts, and perhaps with language as an obsolete medium of exchange of ideas. She knew you would be confused, perhaps snowed under by the mental force of the mass mind. She knew that until you knew more of what it was about, you would perhaps be a victim of the insanities of the mental forces focussing through you.

"You wouldn't know they weren't your own thought. If they caused death, you would associate the act with your own will which had nothing to do with it.

"You would have to be directed to a certain extent after a while. And I'm doing that re-directing."

"Then—right now—you're the Focus?" Stan asked.

"Yes," Fay said simply.

"And tomorrow?"

"I will be—just Fay. You will have no further need of the Focus."

"Then, this is our last meeting?" Stan asked sadly.

"For the present," Fay said. "You will be able to become master of the situation. You have that in you which can help you. For a while, after you become the Master Focus of mankind, you will remain as you are. But your will, your self-awareness, will have become implanted in all mankind as a fragmentary mental peppering. When your body dies, your self-awareness will live on, rationalizing mass thought. You will be able to choose another physical residence for focussing your sensory awareness, and raise it up to a position of leadership.

"Some day, centuries from now, I will come back. Then, we can meet as equals."

"And what about Fay?" Stan asked.

Fay was silent. Suddenly, she shook her head dazedly. "What were you saying darling?" she said. "I dozed off."

"WHAT WAS I saying?" Stan repeated after her. "You were doing the talking. What's the last thing you remember saying before you dozed off?"

"It was—" Fay stopped in confusion. "I can't remember now," she added. She twisted around to look back. "Where's the car that was following us? Oh! It's right behind us now."

"And just ahead is where the bad road begins," Stan said grimly. "Brace yourself." He glanced into the rear view mirror. The other car was only twenty feet behind.

Suddenly, he stepped down on the brake pedal. Tires shrieked in seeming fear. The wheels hit the first bump,

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threatening to throw the car bodily into the air.

The other car shot past, tipping at a crazy, impossible angle. For thirty feet, it remained balanced at a forty-five degree angle. Then, it tipped onto its side, bounced upward lazily, upending as it left the road.

Stan had kept his foot on the brake. As the other car went out of sight over the embankment, he became aware that he had stopped. He shut off the motor and jumped out, running to the edge of the embankment to look down at the wrecked car, half in and half out of a pool of swirling salt water.

Fay reached his side.

"Stay here," he said. "I'm going down to see if anyone's alive."

The car was a four-door sedan. The two front doors were underwater. Stan managed to open a rear door and squeeze in. There were two men in the front seat, their forms grotesquely unreal under the oily calm of the water. He reached under the water and seized hair, pulling the two heads up to the surface.

The two men were the reporters. One's head was crushed in. The other's neck was broken.

Stan let the heads slide back into the water. He slipped through the door and swam the few strokes to where he could pull himself onto the rocks. Fay was there, waiting.

"Dead," he said. "Crushed skull, broken neck."

"Can't we bring them to shore?" Fay asked.

"We aren't going to," Stan said. "We're turning around and going back to town and let someone else discover them."

"But we can't do that!" Fay protested.

"We've got to," Stan said. "It's those two reporters."

"Oh," Fay said.

Stan looked at her sharply. There was something different about her suddenly. It came to him what it was, and the knowledge created a sick feeling in him. She was no longer Fay. She was just a girl. And the fear he had seen in other eyes was now in hers.

"I didn't want to kill them!" he snapped. But his voice sounded insincere to his ears. Sickeningly, he realized that he had known the first impulse of the driver would have been to veer to avoid a crash, and that the natural consequence of veering at a speed close to a hundred miles an hour, would be that the car would go out of control.

"Come on," he said, taking her arm, "let's get out of here before another car comes along. It's going to be bad enough when they're found."

They reached the car in silence. Stan turned it around and started back the way they had come. Fay sat erect and pale, her eyes straight ahead.

"I suppose this is the end for us," Stan said bitterly.

"I don't know," Fay said, her voice almost a whisper. "I don't know, Stan."

"I DON'T have anything to do with it," the building superintendant said, rubbing his trembling hands together in a frenzy of fear. "It's the owners. They ordered me to suggest to you that you give up your office and move to some other building. You don't have to. I would resign before I would be party to anything—you know what I mean. I like you."

"Tell them I'll think about it," Stan said.

"Of course," the man said, backing toward the door. "Be glad to." He opened the door and backed out, barely able to stand.

Stan stared moodily at the paper

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spread out on his desk. He read the headlines again: TWO MORE CASUALTIES IN WAR ON OLIVER. In the right hand column was the account of the finding of the bodies of the two reporters in their car, a brief review of the death of the typesetter, and nothing more. There was no need for more. The readers would draw the inference, and they had.

"Bogey men," Stan whispered. "The building manager is so afraid that he could actually have a heart attack, and everyone would be convinced I killed him. Fay is going out with me tonight because she's afraid not to. Gertrude fainted when she took a letter this morning. Why do I find myself suddenly surrounded by fear?"

He sighed and stood up, running the back of his hand over his bloodshot eyes. He stood dejectedly by his desk, running his fingers over his unshaven stubble of beard.

He went over to the window and raised it. Bending over, he looked down into the street far below.

"It wouldn't be so bad," he thought. "Perhaps twenty or so seconds of knowing it's coming, then—bingo—so fast you can't even feel it." He placed his hands on the outer edge of the ledge. Slowly, he drew back, tensing his legs for the jump through the window. He closed his eyes so that he wouldn't see it coming.

The phone rang.

Stan swayed dizzily, drawing back from the open window. "What came over me?" he thought. "I was going to—to jump!"

The ringing of the phone reminded him of what had jerked him back. He went to the desk and picked it up. "Yes," he said shakily.

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Oliver," Gertrude said politely. "Harold Jarvis."

"Tell him to wait," Stan said. "Or better yet, tell him to come back in an hour."

There was a murmured conversation. "He says he'll wait, Mr. Oliver," Gertrude said.

Stan dropped the phone back on its cradle and sank into his office chair, cupping his head in his arms.

"God!" he sobbed. He began to tremble. "I was going to kill myself." He cried quietly, the tenseness that had been with him all night draining away....

HE BECAME aware that some weight was pressing against his ribs uncomfortably. He started to reach to shift it. He looked over at the receptionist and decided against it. She might suspect he had a gun.

A gun? But that couldn't be. He was in his own office. Not out here sitting on one of the chairs in the waiting room. Why did Gertrude ignore him?

Suddenly, Stan realized the truth. The same thing was happening that had happened the day he had killed—the day the typesetter had died of a heart attack.

The instant he realized it, he became cautious. The other time he had caused a death. This time, he must be careful.

He quieted his emotions and remained passive, studying what was in his awareness. He began to realize two very remarkable things. First, he couldn't find any trace of awareness of the feelings of his own body. It was obviously sound asleep. He turned his head and looked at the closed door on the other side of which he was sleeping, his head on his desk.

Second, this man Harold Jarvis was aware of his contact or presence or whatever it was, and alternated between alarm and telling himself that it was just "being wrought up".

Footsteps jerked his fascinated

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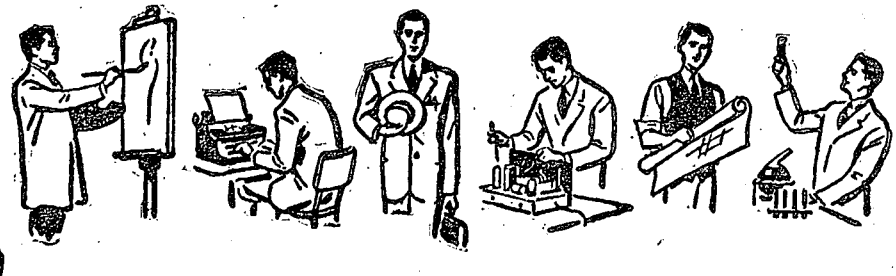

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attention away from the door. Gertrude had gotten up and was going toward the hall door.

"I'll be back in a few moments," she smiled.

Thoughts surged excitedly in Harold Jarvis's mind. Stan suddenly understood. This man was here to kill him!

He sensed the man getting to his feet as the door swung closed on Gertrude's back, and turned toward the door to his office. Frantically, he tried to force the man to sit down again. Almost, but not quite, he could command the muscles.

Harold Jarvis was certain now of what was in his mind. His thoughts were lanced with flashes of stark fear. But he forced himself forward, his hand shaking inside his coat, his fingers closing over the butt of the heavy automatic and drawing it out.

Stan realized he was doomed to failure in his attempt to stop the man. Could he make him die of heart failure as he had the typesetter?

The gun was in one hand, safety off. The other hand closed around the knob and turned it slowly, cautiously.

Stan could feel the heart beat against ribs. He lashed out in mental frenzy at it, feeling it flutter irregularly. But in that same instant, something else came over him. He stopped his attempts, sensing he had stopped just in time.

THE DOOR swung open. He saw himself, head buried in folded arms.

"A moment ago I was going to throw myself out the window," Stan thought. "Now, I can shoot myself and watch myself die."

He watched in fascination as the hand holding the gun rose slowly to aim. He held his breath as he felt a finger tighten on the trigger. But it was not he who was holding his breath. It was Harold Jarvis.

What would happen when the bullet ploughed into his body and killed him? Would the sights and sounds and feeling he was experiencing stop? Of course. What he was experiencing was a form of telepathy. It would end when his brain was torn by the bullet.

His brain? He sighted along the gunsights with Harold Jarvis to make sure. It was.

In that instant, a deafening explosion sounded in his ears. His sleeping form jerked and lay still. He stared at the black hole in the center of the still head, waiting for the blackout that didn't come.

The door from Dave's office jerked open. Dave stood there taking in the situation.

Stan felt the hand holding the gun rise. With a surge of power from some hidden source, he forced the hand down. Harold Jarvis backed out the door, slamming it.

Or was it Harold Jarvis? He slipped the gun in his shoulder holster as naturally as though it were he himself. He reached the hall door and opened it, slipping into the hall.

But a part of him was still back in the office looking at the figure slumped on the desk. He was standing in the doorway from Dave's office. He was seeing what Dave saw. He was moving toward the desk.

He saw Dave's hand reach down—or was it his hand? The fingers had touched the wrist that belonged to Stanley Oliver. The skin was growing cold already. There was no pulse.

"I'm dead!" he whispered. "But I—no! It's Stanley Oliver that's dead, not I."

A SENSE of relief settled over *it*. Relief and happiness, together with an inrush of feelings and thoughts beyond the ability of one mind to hold, but not beyond the power of one mind to focus into

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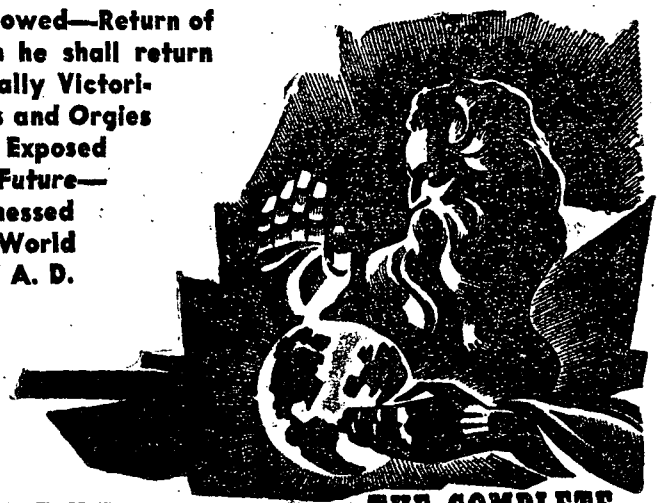

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READER'S PAGE

PAGING BACK ISSUES

Dear Editor:

Whee! Teen-agers on the march! I wish that I'd written more than 2 ½ years ago when I first became interested in FA. I'll be 14 next January.

If Tom Covington is reading this, would you tell me how to get in touch with Young Fandom? Thanks.

I have a number of friends who are avid science fiction readers but who scorn fantasy. They keep trying to persuade me to drop FA and AS. I haven't yet, and I doubt if I ever will. Right now, I read both fiction and fantasy with equal interest. I especially like stories about life-after-death (see the end of my letter), ancient myths ("When the World Tottered", "Long Beer—Short Horn"), aliens at home or away ("Earthbound", "To the Victors"), and stories that make you think ("You're All Alone", "Survival").

I thought that all of this month's stories were good except "Chrysalis". The idea was good, but I think that the writer was confused. Twice he left the earth with one male inhabitant and twice that one man, all by himself, repopulated the earth. Huh?

"To the Victors" and "Earthbound" were especially fine because they represent so well the "human" attitude toward everything alien. "The Devil Finds Work" was one of the best short shorts I have ever read. Just the same, it doesn't surpass "Author Unknown"—a really great idea.

The girl on the cover looked like she had just gotten a good look at Niflheim. Otherwise it was fine.

Three cheers for Lester Del Rey for that wonderful story of the Norse Gods. However, until you publish that dictionary of sf terms, won't you ask your authors to tone down the $5 words like einherjar and names like Heimdallr, etc.

Some time ago I read two stories in FA. I remember them but not the titles or dates. One of them was about a flier who was shot down over Africa and found himself several thousand years in the past. He met a cave girl with blonde hair and a tiger skin, a dark haired beauty from Atlantis, and got in trouble with a small golden god. In the end, he killed some Atlantians and went back to the blonde.

The other was about a man who was working on an atomic project. A Russian spy seriously wounded him, and for a while he hovered between life and death. During this time, he met his alter egos and took a trip through Heaven and Hell. In the end, he saves the world by blowing up himself, his sweetheart and the Red Spy. They all go happily to Heaven.

If some one could get in touch with me, I'd like to buy the issues. Thanks.

Judy Sanow
142 ½ S. Sycamore Ave.
Los Angeles 36, Cal.

The two stories you query about are: "This Way to Heaven" by Harold Sherman (October 1948 FA), and "Forgotten Worlds" by Lawrence Chandler (May 1948 FA).

Incidentally, these friends you mention, why not do them a good turn and convince them that they're missing a whale of a lot of good reading enjoyment by not following your lead.....LES

SALT, SALT—BUT NO FA!

Dear Editor:

This is the first time I have written a fan letter, but have been a silent fan for at least 2 years. Although I read all the sf magazines that come out, I am always out of reading material. They aren't published often enough!

I live in California, but once a year or so take a visit to my home town of Salt Lake. What's the matter with that state? Haven't they heard of science fiction mags, or don't they like them? Have never been able to locate one, not *one* there. How come not?

In case you publish this letter—of course that's not a hint!—I want to remark on a reader's letter: Ralph Bailey of New York, very refreshing in December's issue of FANTASTIC.

Best story in my opinion in same ish—"To The Victors", "When the World Tottered", close second; others all fair, but what, just what, was the "Devil Finds Work?" What on earth? And certainly not off it. Not for sf mags at all!

By the way, I second the motion to print the names of the readers whose letters could not be printed. Excellent idea. Don't recall ever seeing mine in print and must confess would like to. Bet you'd get more subscriptions, too, as in that way they'd know you really read their letters instead of getting the impression you only open a few and throw

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the rest out.

I love science fiction stories. 'Nuff sed.

Catherine Vigil
251 Church St.
San Francisco, Cal.

Both FA and AS are on sale in Utah. The reason you haven't been able to find a copy there is because they've been all sold out. So why not subscribe, and then you'd have nothing to worry about...LES

WANTS WEIRD STORIES

Ye Ed:

I just got the December issue, so I haven't had time to read the Del Rey novel yet but it looks good. Not as long as I expected, though. If it's anywhere as good as "Mistress of the Djinn", it'll be a classic. Yes sir, that story was darned good—better than "Masters of Sleep". It seems that FA has had a novel in it almost every issue for quite a while, whereas AMAZING hasn't had a good long story since I don't know when. Remember '47? "Star Kings", "Giants of Mogo", etc.? Now all we get is little dinky so-called "short novels" thrown at us. At the moment, I'm inclined to think that FA is somewhat better than AS.

I think it's a good idea for Ziff-Davis to put out a ghost magazine. You could call it "Supernatural Tales" or "Horrible Adventures", "Ghostly Stories", etc. But if you do, put in weird NOVELS.

Jack Safarik
Box 397
Genoa, Illinois

You'll be finding more novels in FA in coming issues—and keep watching AS for some big surprises.....LES

TEEN-AGERS FOR FANS

Dear Editor:

It is true that when I first expressed horror about teen-agers usurping your letter columns, I did so in all frank sincerity. Now, however, my views have changed a bit. I have become quite resigned to teen-agers in fandom; as a matter of fact, the thought makes me fairly drip with glee. Tom Covington paints a drab picture of stf by saying the major part is suited to the mental age of the nation. Let us hope that the quality of off-trail science fiction is preponderate to the quantity of that type of stf in which emphasis is on adventure, with cheap "scientific" gadgetry thrown in for good measure. As Tom said, stfans do have more imagination. But intelligence could well be the criterion for imagination; few intellectuals lack a keenly polished imagination, and it is the dreamer that works to fulfil his dreams who is a great man in any era. (Thanks to Tom Covington for his flattery which was not wasted on me. Didn't mean to disagree with him like that...)

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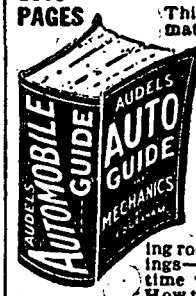

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writer of the best letter each month has its points. I wouldn't feel right in writing you if I felt I was entering a contest, but to receive an original would do wonders to rectify that. It all depends on how you look at it.

If you would like a big reader reaction on W. P. Ganley's contest proposition, you're getting one from this big reader. That is a good—I said GOOD—idea. You could cut out the fillers, or features, as you prefer to label them, and stick in some fan material. I don't know if you'd be willing to pay a penny a word, but some nominal reward is suitable. Although it would be payment enough for me to see one of my stories in FA. One of my stories in FA??? Hah! That was a foolish thought. Oh well...

I got a big kick out of Ralph Bailey's letter, by the way. A letter column is almost vapid without at least one humorous letter. Well, so much for the sacred READER'S PAGE. Now for the next interesting thing in your magazine—the stories.

They were all slightly above average, with the exception of "When The World Tottered". I suppose this was well written, but I just wasn't interested enough to finish it. I may, someday when I have more time.

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Did I say all the stories were slightly above average??? Pardon me, Mr. Hickey, and may I eat my words. "To The Victors" was the best story in this, and several other issues. Perhaps the Martian setting reminded me of Bradbury, but the whole story reminds me of Bradbury's rigid beauty of description, his liquid flow of phrase. If you can't give us Bradbury, at least give us Bradbury imitators!

Still eating my words, I find "Chrysalis" far below average. Its incoherency was more than confusing; it was maddening. Is L. Major Reynolds a very clumsy camouflage for Mack Reynolds? If it is, I don't blame Mack for not claiming it. Reynolds' "The Devil Finds Work" was an amusing switch to an old—nay, aged—plot. "Earthbound", and "The Wizard of Blue Gap" were interesting.

All in all, the December edition of FANTASTIC was pleasurable reading matter. Still, you have never equalled an issue like those you published around 1948 and 1949. I suppose those issues weren't particularly fascinating to most of your readers, but FA and AS had just introduced me to stf at that time, and each story was new and wonderful and delightfully intriguing. Is science fiction going stale on me, or am I going stale on science fiction?

My vote for the best letter goes to Ralph Bailey. Don't be discouraged if voting is slight at first. It's easy to forget (as I almost did) if you don't make much mention of voting for the best letter.

Earl Newlin, Jr.
103 Peck Ave.
San Antonio 10, Texas

No, Earl, L. Major Reynolds and Mack Reynolds are two different people....LES

THE TEENS ARE ON THE BALL!

Dear Ed:

I hope it's not too late for a letter concerning, among other things, the December FA. Of late, at a time when more sf magazines are being published than ever before, I am buying less sf magazines than ever before; I still seem to be getting AS & FA, however, for some reason or other.

Tom Covington's letter was fairly well developed, but I disagree with him in several respects.

What's this about teen-agers!? I note a condescending attitude on the part of the older fans, and a defiant attitude on the part of the younger fans.

Let's use specifics, for a change, instead of generalities—Tom's quite right on that point. Let's call these young fans the pre-high school fans, the high school fans, and the college fans. I, myself, belong to the second group. I am sixteen years old, with half a year to go before I graduate (in January). I intend to attend college, preferably the nearby University of Buffalo; then to be a teacher, and I hope subsequently a writer. I get over 90 percent in almost all subjects in school,

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without doing much work on 'em. I read all types of books and magazines; I prefer science-fantasy, but have enjoyed "Emperor Jones", "Scaramouche", "The World of A", and other similarly unrelated works. I write and enjoy prose and poetry. I enjoy scientific things, especially chemistry; and like to write.

I don't mean to give a life-history of Me, but thought it might be well to state my own position at the beginning. Now, back to the arguments.

High school students are one of my pet peeves. There are a lot of exceptions, and for the most part, they are my friends; but that does not erase the fact that the average high school pupil is not interested in the abstract. Tom's assumption that most don't read comic books is, I firmly believe, optimistic. Most of them don't bother to read anything at all. Sometimes I wonder if they can read.

It is furthermore true that some of these people mature, grow into better individuals with a balanced diet of literature as well as dances and football games and the like.

Naturally, tastes are bound to differ between age groups. But—I know a number of so-called adults who seem more like eighth-graders than certain eighth-graders.

"Teen-ager" or "high school student" recalls to mind the average individual of the class, which is only natural. Tom claims that young fans who read stf are not above average; I claim they are. They are in the first place because they bother to read anything at all. They are in the second place because, arguments to the contrary, stfantasy is abstract ofttimes and therefore more difficult to comprehend than a rip-roaring Hopalong Cassidy epic. They are in the third place because the acti-fans, or semi-acti-fans, in this age group actually take time out to write letters to editors, which takes both time and knowledge of construction of sentences.

Finally, however, the teen-agers are forced to compete with the older fans. That they can write equally interesting letters must mean something. Often, also, a person in high school has a greater all-round store of knowledge than someone who graduated from high school ten years ago—if only because it is fresh in the mind of the former, and the latter has probably forgotten much of what he learned.

So let's have no more controversy, eh? There is no reason for it. I'd much rather talk about bouncing moons than that.

Also, let's not have this "I'm two years old, and I'm proud of every micro-second of it." Because, actually, someone who says that is very likely to be clutching every further micro-second that sends him on his way to old age, and is merely attempting to persuade himself that he is proud of that.

Phooey!

I still think the contest is a good idea; come on, you guys out there, write ye ed and tell him to try it out! There are a

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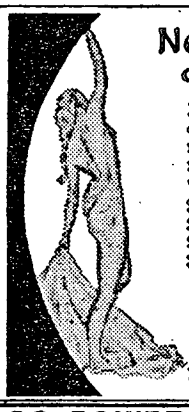

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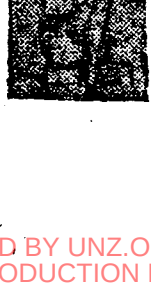

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lot of people who could write good stories, if only their market were larger.

I've read the lead novel; not bad. In fact, rather good, though it could have been worked over just a little bit more. "To The Victors"...fairly good, only I dislike it for this reason. Here are the Earthmen, growing up as a race; there are the Martians, dying out. First of all, the Martians had had quite a long time to get interspacial travel. But that isn't the main objection. A statement in the tale said the last Martian war had been 10,000 years before—a mere month in the lifetime of the race. In all likelihood, the Martians had been just as warlike in their infancy as a race as the Earthmen were at the time of the story. Here are the Martians, peaceful, tolerant—so they start a war that will kill off an entire race, destined for the stars. So they are really just as bad as the Earthmen; worse, in the respect that they are hypocritical.

"Devil Finds Work" was cute; "Chrysalis" I didn't read, except the ending; I could have rewritten the story myself from that, the title, and the first sentence. The last two tales I haven't read yet.

I had intended to write to Browne regarding the current AMAZING, but time slipped by, so I may as well include my comments herein.

Someone wrote in asking about the "7 miles per second" speed that seems to be stuck in peoples' minds. He stated that it was escape velocity for something given one initial start, then allowed to coast; but if (he continued) a rocket received, as it does, a lot of "little pushes", it would not be required to reach that escape velocity. Mr. Browne demurred and compared the Earth's gravitation to a rubber band.

NO! NO! Horrors, no! The earth's gravitational field is, like a magnetic field. Its "pull" decreases as an object moves away from the earth; as the square of the distance, I think. On the other hand, the pull of a rubber band would increase as it stretched.

Does Mr. Browne suppose a rocket will rise into the air until it reaches a certain speed and then snap forward, breaking the chains of gravity? Certainly sounds like it.

(In case the reader disbelieves my statement that the pull of a rubber band increases when it is stretched, I would suggest hanging a small weight on one end of a rubber band, and allowing it to hang freely. Then add another and another. The band will stretch downward farther with the addition of each increased load. If a weight is removed, it will snap back to some extent.)

Suppose it takes 100 pounds of initial pressure to send a golf ball five hundred yards. You can also get it to the end of the five hundred yards with two successive blows of 50 pounds each, and four of twenty-five, and 100 of one pound each—try it and see.

Thus, the rocket does not need to reach

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a speed of 7 mps. If Mr. Browne is not subdued, I would appreciate some answer from him anent this as well as from you and the readers. This is an interesting subject to argue about. Come one, come all.

W. Paul Ganley
119 Ward Road
North Tonawanda, N.Y.

In the December AS, we answered a question regarding escape velocity in a manner to bring out a rebuttal from readers who like their science "straight". Our reason was simply this: To find out how many of our audience would catch it. We were more than mildly astonished to learn that a staggering percentage of the readers caught the flaw and wrote us heatedly concerning it. Let's call it a "noble experiment" and then change the subject quickly .....LES

AND ONE FOR BROOKLYN

Dear Sir:

I have been reading FA and AS for some time now, and have finally decided to write. As for your November issue, the story I enjoyed most was "I Take This Earthman" by Charles V. DeVet. I hope that in your coming issues you will have more of his stories. Next in line came "Mistress of the Djinn" by Geoff St. Reynard. In comparison to his other story, "Elementals of Jedar", I think this one an improvement. "The Dreaming Trees" followed, and last and certainly least, "One Way" and "Long Beer—Short Horn".

I wonder if it would be possible to get the issue that has "The Shades of Toffee" in it from any reader willing. Of course, I will pay for the cost.

I hope this letter is printed for I haven't ever seen any letter representing BROOKLYN. Also, I don't think it is fair to keep printing a few peoples' letters over and over.

Sidney Klotz
2322 63rd St.
Brooklyn 4, N.Y.

"The Shades of Toffee" appeared in the June 1950 issue of FA.
We have no set rule, Sid, governing which letters will appear in the RP. We try to follow a procedure of first-come, first-served, so get your letters in early—all you fans.....LES

THAT REPRINT BUGABOO

Dear Sir:

Please permit me to stick in my 3c worth on the subject of reprint magazines. You have made your own feelings quite clear in your comments to letters from a Donald V. Allgeier. Also, another editor of a magazine called OTHER WORLDS, seems to be in league with you on this discussion, as he recently wrote a whole editorial on this subject, although he

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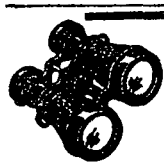
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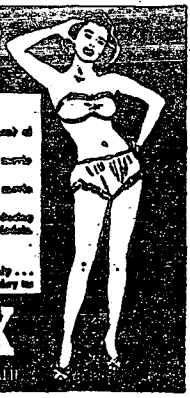

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tried to give the impression the opinions were not his own, but of some writer. I think he wrote it all.

Frankly, both your arguments are preposterous. I buy both the reprint and the "first run" magazines. There is hack in all of them, but the average quality is much higher in the reprint magazines, particularly those which carry stories from the old Munsey magazines. They are rendering a service to science fiction readers by giving us stories of high quality which we did not know existed. Your arguments against sound like sour grapes. If there were no reprint magazines, you could sell more of your own. So, down with the competition. It is unfair to the legitimate magazines, you say. That makes the reprints illegitimate in your opinion.

Bosh. This is America. Any business enterprise is legitimate as long as it meets a public demand. If American readers did not want to read the reprints, they would not exist.

It is only in Russia that open competition is restricted. They have only one ticket to vote on election day. We would laugh at our auto dealers if they started a move to close down the used car lots, so they could sell more new cars. But look at what you are trying.

Get on the ball. Demand better writing from your authors. Quit buying their below-par hack.

When your magazine carries the best stories, it will sell the most copies to the American readers. All it takes is proof that you are running the best. Hack writers should not be encouraged like they are at present. That is partly what is wrong now, and your policy would keep them going. You are fighting a losing battle. More science fiction magazines are appearing on the newsstands every day. That is ducky for the writers and keeps the hacks going still more. You can't hope to boost your sales by trying to surpass them. Pay the most, buy the best and you will sell the most. That is your only hope.

A good word: Your FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is showing a marked improvement in recent issues. Wish I could say the same for your AMAZING magazine and your friend's two magazines, but not at present.

I never thought I would be writing a letter to a magazine editor, but your reprint discussion and comments got my ire up. Please note that there is no personal offense intended.

George C. Jenkins
Roswell, New Mexico

Your comments on the reprint situation are quite interesting. We will admit this much: Some of the reprints are of a high quality, but our original contention that reprint magazines are a blow to the professional writer, still stands. After all, if you eliminate the professional writer's market now, where will you get your reprints in the future?.....LES

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—William F. Wydallis
Van Wert, Ohio

CHARLES KAMA

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THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

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